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MAJOR SPORTS—W. L. HUGHES, *Editor*

BASEBALL

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTORY	10
1. PITCHING	11
2. CATCHING	23
3. FIRST BASE	31
4. SECOND BASE	39
5. SHORTSTOP	47
6. THIRD BASE	54
7. OUTFIELD PLAY	59
8. BATTING AND BUNTING	65
9. BASE RUNNING	78
10. SIGNALS AND TEAM PLAY	85
INDEX	91

BASEBALL

INTRODUCTORY

Baseball, like basketball, is an American game. While it is true that man has played ball in some form from time immemorial, it is a proven fact that baseball is a game of distinctly American origin. The first plan for playing the game in its present form was devised by Abner Doubleday, at Cooperstown, New York, in 1839. He drew the first known diagram of the diamond, indicating the positions of the players. From the stage of a boy with a ball, the game evolved to two boys, a ball, and a base. Thus the game of "One Old Cat" was born. The next steps in the development of the game were natural and easy. Other boys and bases were added to make games of Two, Three, and Four Old Cat until the field became square-shaped with a base at each corner. The remarkable thing about Doubleday's diamond is the ingenious relationship worked out by him regarding distances between bases and the speed of a batted or thrown ball. A pitched ball, which is hit on the ground to the shortstop and thrown accurately by him to first base, will usually beat the batter by a step.

Baseball is played not only in schools, colleges, and professional leagues, but in almost every city, town, and hamlet in the country. Patrons of the sport are familiar with its rules and strategy and understand the techniques and tactics involved in every play. It is the National Game par excellence.

CHAPTER I

PITCHING

The pitcher is undoubtedly the most important member of a ball club. His value has been variously estimated to be as much as fifty to seventy-five per cent of the defensive strength of a team. Other things being equal, or nearly so, the team with the better pitcher usually wins. In fact, the success or failure of the entire season of a school or college club depends largely upon the ability of the pitchers. The coach, therefore, will need to pick carefully the candidates for this position and spend a major portion of his time in developing the pitching fundamentals.

To the average fan and to many beginning players all a boy needs to be a pitcher is speed and a "round-house" curve. But much more is involved than merely throwing a ball hard or making it curve. Success depends upon the mastery of certain skills, including proper grip of the ball, position on the mound, delivery, control, variety of pitches, fielding with and without men on bases, and strategy.

The Grip.—The pitcher should hold the ball as nearly the same as possible on all deliveries to prevent the opponents from diagnosing the pitch. It is held with the thumb and first and second fingers either along or across the stitches. The raised stitches are rough and they aid the pitcher in controlling the ball and in giving the "spin." The overhand pitcher's best fast ball rises, therefore, he grips the ball *across* the seams. This causes the ball to rotate *four* seams toward the batter, thereby getting more air resistance and a greater rise. The sidearm and underhand pitcher's best fast ball, on the other hand, is likely to be a "sinker." He will grip the ball, therefore, *along* the seams. This causes it to rotate only *two* seams at the batter.

Position on the Rubber.—The rules require the pitch to be made from a "rubber" which is six inches wide and twenty-four inches long. Both feet must be *on* or one on and the other in front of the rubber. Boy pitchers on playground or sand-lot teams frequently get into the bad habit of walking into the pitch. Control cannot be developed except under actual game conditions.

Before the pitch a right-handed thrower should stand with the feet as indicated in Diagram 130. As the ball is delivered the feet turn.

As the pitcher follows through after the delivery his feet take the position shown. Diagram 130 also shows the position of the feet *with men on bases* and indicates the forward movement of the left foot and the follow-through of the right foot.

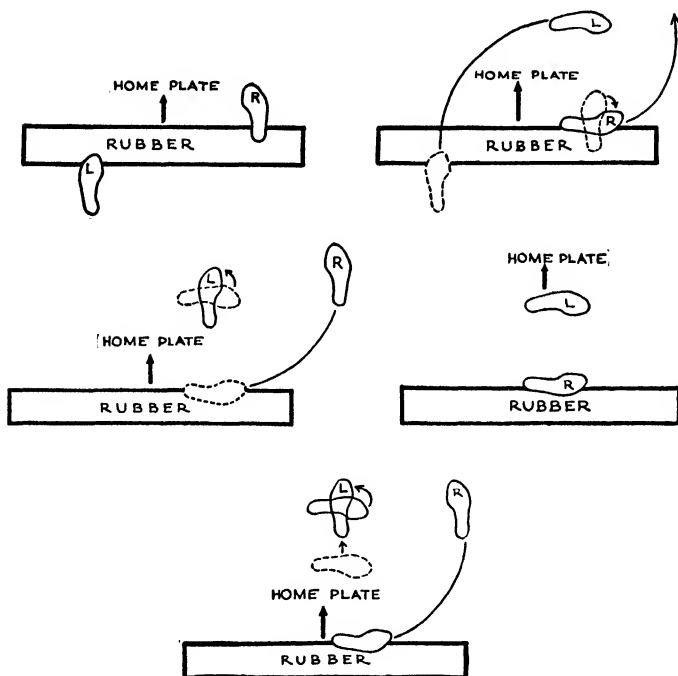


DIAGRAM 130.—The position of the right-handed pitcher's feet: on the pitching rubber before the pitch with no one on base (upper left); as the ball is delivered (upper right and middle left); with runners on base (middle right); in the follow through (lower).

The Delivery.—The delivery or pitching motion may be divided into the wind-up, body pivot and swing, and follow-through. These movements should all be synchronized and rhythmical.

The *wind-up* should be simple. Complicated twistings and gyrations, formerly thought to confuse batters, are no longer used by the best pitchers. The most energy-conserving and effective method is the one where, preparatory to the pitch, both arms are raised over and back of the head with hands together and the glove concealing the

grip on the ball. This is the "stretch" which loosens the arm and back muscles. Some pitchers add to this stretch a swinging motion of the arms from a hanging position at the sides, backward-upward to a horizontal position, forward-upward to the "stretch" above the back of the head followed by the pitch.

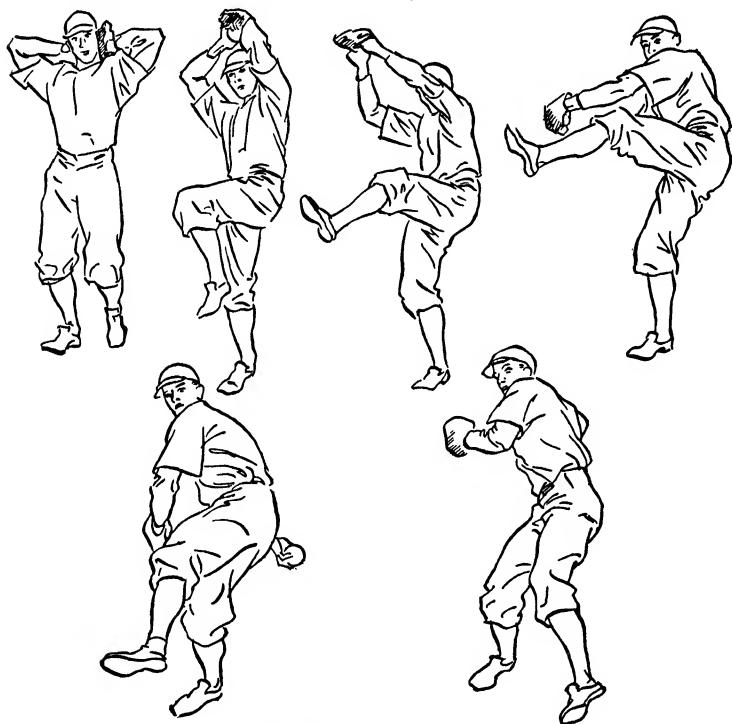


FIG. 41.—This shows the pitcher in position on the rubber, the "stretch," the leg kick, and the body pivot preparatory to the pitch.

The *body pivot and swing* begins by pivoting to the right on the right foot, kicking high and to the right with the left leg and knee, as the body turns away from the batter. Simultaneously, the right arm is brought back and down. This leaves the pitcher balanced on his right foot with right arm back and left leg forward. The body and arm first swing away from the hitter and then swing rhythmically back toward him. The body coils for the effort then uncoils with the pitch as the arm and body swing forward. The forward step with the

left leg should be directly at the plate. This step may be too short resulting in loss of maximum effectiveness or it may be too long interfering with the follow-through.

The *follow-through* adds smoothness and power to the pitch and also results in the proper position for fielding the position. A skillful pitcher, who can field his position, is in reality a fifth infielder. In the

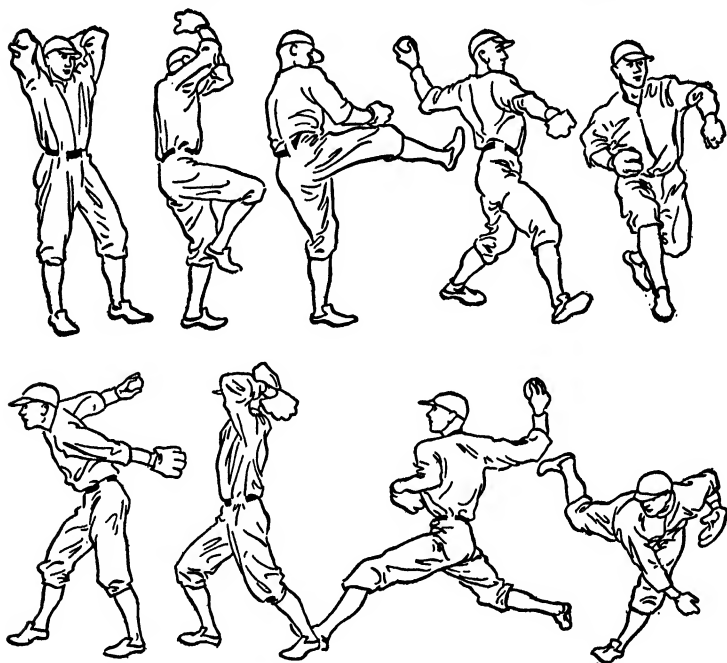


FIG. 42.—Pitching form. Note the stretch, the leg-kick, the body pivot, the whip of the arm, and the follow-through (left to right).

follow-through the right foot follows the pitching arm forward. It should swing in a wide arc, rather than close to the body, and should be planted up even with the left foot immediately after the ball has been released. This leaves the pitcher crouched on the balls of both feet and in position to go any direction for any ball batted back into pitching territory. See Figures 41 and 42.

In swinging the arm forward as the ball is thrown the pitcher may use one of three deliveries: over-arm, side-arm, or under arm.

Over-Arm Delivery.—The over-arm delivery is the most used because

it is the most natural and, therefore, is the easiest to acquire. It results in a "hop" or "rise" on the fast ball and a "hook" or "drop" on the curve ball. Moreover, when thrown by a big man on a high mound the over-arm pitch comes down and across the plate at a decided angle or "slant" making it exceedingly difficult for the batter to meet it squarely. In the strictly over-arm motion the arm passes directly over the shoulder in a vertical arc. Many pitchers are known as three-quarter over-arm throwers. In this pitching motion the arm passes forward about three quarters of the distance between a horizontal and vertical arc. The famous Dizzy Dean uses a three-quarter over-arm motion.

Side-Arm Delivery.—In the side-arm delivery the arm swings forward parallel to the ground in a horizontal arc. This delivery is more difficult to master and the "curve" which breaks away from a right handed batter is not as deceptive as the "out-drop" curve of the over-arm thrower. It does have its advantages, however. The curve, if started toward a batter, tends to drive an experienced hitter back and away from the plate. The fast ball also may be effective since it "hops" or curves in toward the batter frequently causing him to hit a weak grounder or fly-ball off the handle of the bat.

Under-Arm Delivery.—The under-arm delivery is not recommended for young ball players. It is the most difficult style to master and is, therefore, used very little. Carl Mays was the only exponent of this delivery who ever attained major league stardom. The under-hand fast ball is released with a forward spin which results in an effective "sinker" or drop. The curve is not very effective.

Control.—A pitcher may have acquired the proper grip of the ball, position on the rubber, wind-up, body pivot and swing, and follow-through but all these efforts may be wasted if he lacks *control*. Control means more than mere ability to throw the ball over the plate. Control means the ability to throw a fast, or curve, or slow ball across a corner of the plate, knee or waist or shoulder high, and inside or

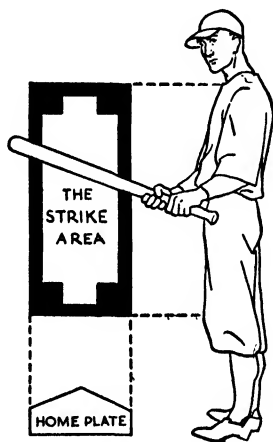


FIG. 43.—The darkened area indicates the inside, outside, high, and low corners and edges of the plate. Control means the ability to throw strikes in this darkened area.

outside. (Figure 43.) Hours, months, even years of practice, is the only way to approach perfection. No pitcher ever attained major league stardom without control. It is the most important single factor in success. Few beginning pitchers can throw consistently a curve ball across the outside corner of the plate, knee high.

Kinds of Pitches.—While control is the most important single factor in successful pitching, speed is the next most essential asset. Every pitcher should have a fast ball and a curve. With added experience, it is desirable to develop also a slow ball or "change of pace."

The Fast Ball.—Speed is largely a natural gift. It is rarely ever developed to any great extent. While size is usually an asset not all fast ball pitchers are big men.

The fast ball is held between the thumb, underneath, and the first and second fingers, above. The ball should be grasped with the fingers

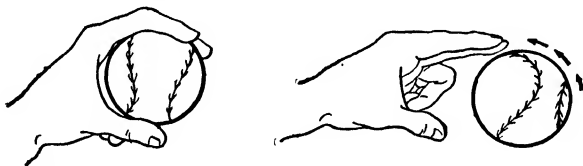


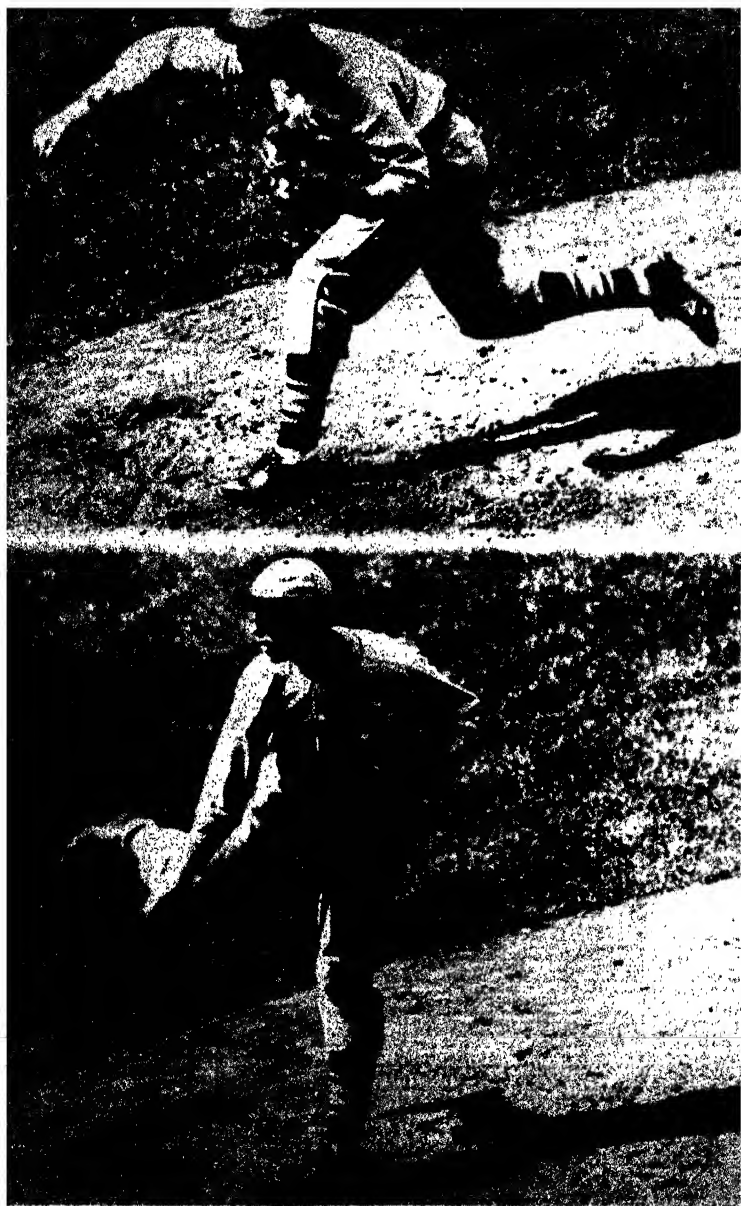
FIG. 44.—The left-handed pitcher's grip for the fast ball. Note how the ball is held in the tips of the first and second fingers above and the thumb below. Note also how the ball is released with a backward spin.

along or *across* the seams since the raised stitches aid in controlling and spinning the ball. In grasping *along* the stitches each finger is placed along a seam where they come closest together. *Remember to hold the ball in the finger tips* rather than in the palm of the hand. The sensitive nerve endings are in the tips of the fingers. The ball should be held rather lightly. Tight gripping causes tension. The ball should be released from an overarm delivery with the fingers on top of the ball. (See Figure 44). As the ball passes off the finger tips it is given a rapid "backward spin" which causes it to "hop" or "rise" as it passes the hitter. This pitch is most effective at shoulder height, inside, but it may be alternated with a curve ball at knee height occasionally. Inexperienced pitchers frequently release the ball too soon, before the arm swings through, resulting in a pitch that is too high.

The Curve Ball.—The curve ball will *drop*, if thrown directly overarm; will curve *out* to a right handed batter, if thrown side-arm; and it will *drop down* and *out* if thrown with a three-quarter over-arm motion. This delivery is more difficult to master than the fast ball because it is more unnatural. The ball is held the same as for the fast ball but it is released differently. The ball is released along the side



Keystone (FPG)



Keyilani (PPG)

of the first or index finger and between the finger and thumb (See Figure 45), by a vicious wrist snap, forward and downward. The palm, instead of facing the ground as for the fast ball, faces to the pitcher's left (right hand pitcher). This places fingers and thumb on the sides of the ball rather than on top and bottom. Care should be taken here, as for the fast ball, in not releasing the ball too soon, or too high. The "wrist snap" must be vicious and complete and the arm

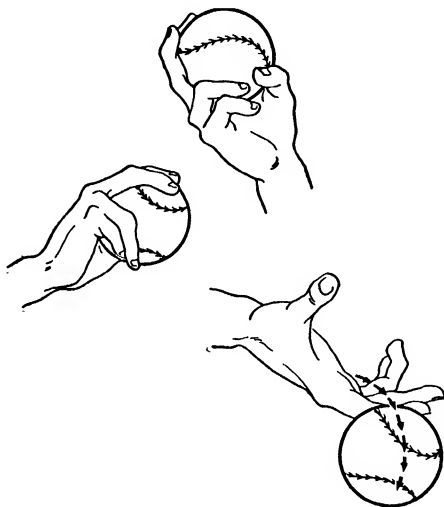


FIG. 45.—The right-handed pitcher's grip and release of the ball for a curve or breaking ball.

must follow through and back with the right shoulder pointing toward the batter, if an effective curve is to be secured.

The Slow Ball or Change of Pace.—The slow ball may be a straight ball or a curve but it is what the name implies, a slow ball. It is difficult to throw and should be gradually developed only after the pitcher has acquired control of his fast ball and his curve. The slow ball, when properly mixed with the other pitches, causes the batter to strike too soon and also has the effect of causing him to strike too late on the fast ball. *Remember that the slow ball must be thrown with the same effort and motion as the fast ball and the curve ball.* This may be accomplished by raising or relaxing the tips of fingers and thumb (Figure 46). Since little wrist and no finger snap is imparted to the ball, no amount of effort could result in more than half or two-thirds speed.

Great care should be taken not to make the slow ball "too good." It should be kept low and outside or in some location where the batter must reach for it.

The great Carl Hubbell throws a two speed curve ball and a two or three speed screw ball by varying the amount of wrist-snap put into the pitching effort. He believes that it is necessary for the finger tips to encircle the ball on all pitches if *control* is to be developed.

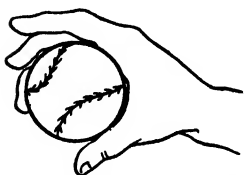


FIG. 46.—The right-handed pitcher's grip for a slow ball. The finger tips and thumb are raised or relaxed and the ball rests back against the base of the fingers.

Other Pitches—The Screw Ball.—The immortal Christy Mathewson first made the "screw" ball or "fadeaway" famous and in recent years Carl Hubbell has revived interest in it. This delivery is too complicated for beginners and few college, or even professional players, can throw a "screw" ball effectively. This pitch in reality is a "reverse-curve," i.e., instead of breaking

away from a hitter as most curves do, it does just the reverse and breaks toward the batter. This is done by releasing the ball off the outside edge of the second finger as the wrist is rotated to the left (right handed pitcher). The resulting spin is just the opposite to the spin on a curve ball. Hubbell developed three speeds for his "screw" ball, thereby making him one of the most effective pitchers who ever lived.

The Knuckle ball, like the "screw" ball, is not recommended for amateur pitchers because of the amount of practice necessary to control it. The knuckles of the first two or three fingers, rather than the finger tips, are held next to the ball. Naturally, the pitch loses the finger snap and spin and the result is a slow "floater." (Figure 47).

Fielding the Position.—As soon as the ball is delivered to the batter the pitcher becomes a fielder and he will need practice on batted balls of all types. He must field hard and slow hit balls in front of him and on his right and left. He must field bunts, throw to bases, cover first on balls hit to his left, and back up bases on certain throws of his mates. He should field or knock down any ball he can reach. Fumbled balls should be picked up with the throwing hand. All throws to first should be quickly and accurately made toward the second base side of the bag and away from the path of the runner. Care should be taken not to over-run bunted balls. In covering first on balls hit to the first baseman, he should approach as shown in Diagram 131.

One sign of an experienced pitcher is the consistency with which he backs up the bases. On throws from the outfield the pitcher should back up the third baseman or catcher at a distance of about forty feet.

Throwing to Bases.—Another test of an experienced pitcher is his ability to keep runners close to the bases. Stolen bases are more likely to be the fault of the pitcher rather than the catcher. With a runner on first or runners on first and third, the pitcher should stand as indicated in Figure 4 where he can watch both the batter and the base runners. He can watch first base by turning his head slightly to the left in a direction between home plate and first. By peripheral vision he can see the baseman and the runner, unless the latter is taking

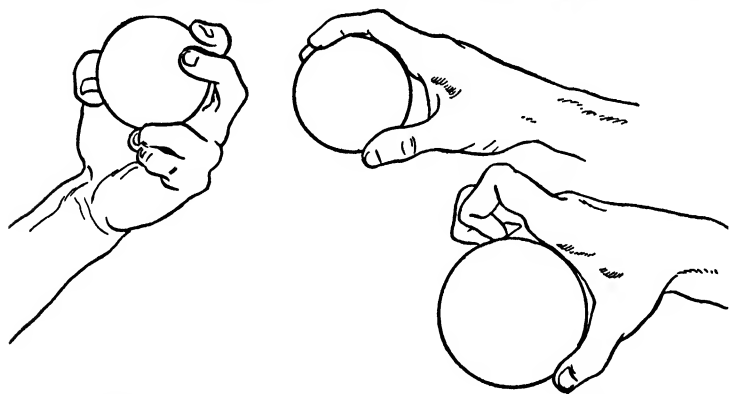


FIG. 47.—Methods of gripping the ball for pitching: the knuckle ball (below); the fast ball (upper right); and the curve ball (left).

a big lead, in which case he should make the throw to first. With a man on second base the right handed pitcher usually turns to the left to make the throw. With a runner on third base only, he may take his regular position on the mound, Figure 1, and his wind-up.

All mannerisms, such as hunching the shoulder, shifting the feet, body sway, bending the knee, and other superfluous motions, should be meticulously avoided with men on bases unless used with the regular delivery. The great Ty Cobb stole bases almost at will against one pitcher by watching the contraction of the leg muscle which invariably preceded the pitch to the batter.

Certain fundamental principles should be observed by all young pitchers in throwing to bases. Develop a peculiarity of pitching motion so that base runners cannot easily determine whether the pitch is to be made to the catcher or the baseman.

Study the rule book carefully so that all legal rights are well known. Frequent balks are signs of a rank novice. The throw to bases is meant to keep the runner close rather than catch him off base. About three-quarter rather than full speed makes the throw easier to handle. It is the quickness with which the ball is gotten away rather than the actual speed of the throw which is most effective. Several lob throws followed by a sudden snap throw may prove successful. The throw should be about knee high and on the side of the base toward the runner.

It is imperative that school and college pitchers practice throwing to batters as consistently and regularly from the stance assumed with

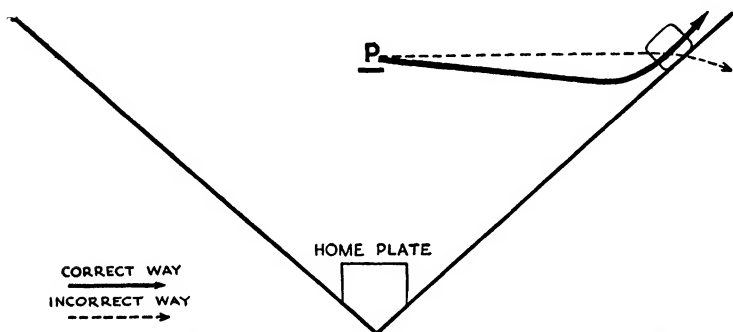


DIAGRAM 131.—The correct and incorrect method of covering first base by the pitcher on ground balls hit to the first baseman.

runners on the bases as from the regular position. Otherwise, when deprived of the wind-up, all control may be lost with men on the bases.

Pitching Strategy.—In addition to sound mechanical equipment such as speed, curve, control, and form the successful pitcher must constantly *use his head*. The fellow who merely throws blindly at the plate may “get by” for a time but skilled hitters will soon be driving mere speed to all corners of the park.

The pitcher with the aid of his catcher, should study the position of every batter who faces him. If the batter “steps in the bucket” or stands back and away from the plate, he should have difficulty reaching pitches on the outside. A man who crowds the plate or one who takes an overly long strike may be weak on a fast ball high and inside. Long distance hitters who hold the bat by the extreme end of the handle may be fooled by an outside curve or a slow ball. Do not use

the slow ball on a weak hitter. As a general rule the best spot for the curve ball (right handed pitcher) is low over the outside corner of the plate for the right handed batter and low and inside for the left handed hitter. Ordinarily, too, the curve ball should be thrown for a strike (corner) and the fast ball should be used for the intentional "waste" ball. Mix the low outside slow ball with a fast one inside and high. Keep ahead of the hitter. Avoid the unenviable position of two strikes and three balls. Do not "groove" one with two strikes and no balls or one ball. If possible, bait the hitter into offering at a ball which is outside, inside, too high, or too low. Show the slow or change of pace ball occasionally even though it has not been entirely mastered. Keep it away from the batter so he cannot meet it squarely but at least make the opposition somewhat uncertain by showing it.

Make every effort to get the first batter in every inning. On school, college, and sand lot teams this man frequently scores without another safe hit being made, once he gets to first.

Few battery signals are needed in amateur baseball. There should be a sign for the fast ball, the curve, and the slow ball, if the pitcher has one. One may be needed also for the "pitch out" when the catcher attempts to catch a base runner or again when he signals the pitcher to turn and throw to second base.

Care of the Arm.—Save the pitching arm. It is the pitchers most valuable asset. Warm up slowly in the spring before attempting a fast ball or a curve. Do this also before each game and inning. Keep the arm warm between innings, even on hot summer days as a breeze or wind may cool it too suddenly. Never pitch with a sore arm, elbow, or shoulder and avoid liniments. Heat and rest, particularly rest, are the surest cures for sore arms.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Why is pitching so important in the success of a ball club?
2. Upon what factors does success in pitching depend?
3. How should the pitcher grip the ball?
4. What is the legal position on the rubber with no one on base? With men on the bases?
5. Describe the pitching motion or delivery.
6. Why is the over-arm delivery to be recommended as better than either the side-arm or under-arm deliveries?
7. Does "control" mean ability to throw the ball over the plate?
8. Describe the various kinds of pitches. Which ones are recommended for the high school, sand lot, and college pitcher? How is the ball held and released for each pitch?

9. What information should the pitcher have about fielding his position?
About throwing to bases?
10. List hints which should help a pitcher in his "pitching strategy."

TEST QUESTIONS

- T F 1. It is a balk if a pitcher pretends to throw to second base without throwing.
- T F 2. When in position to pitch the pitcher must have one foot in contact with the rubber and the other foot entirely behind the rubber.
- T F 3. Control is probably the most important fundamental of pitching.
- T F 4. Pitchers get the best results with an underhand delivery.
- T F 5. All curve balls should be thrown with a side-arm delivery and all fast balls with an over-arm motion.
- T F 6. The spin of a fast ball thrown by a right handed pitcher with an over-arm motion causes it to curve out away from a right handed hitter.
- T F 7. It is bad strategy to pitch a slow ball to a weak hitter.
- T F 8. Rest is the best cure for a sore arm.
- T F 9. The pitcher should not be used on "cut-off" plays, which are designed to intercept throws from the outfield to home plate.
- T F 10. The pitcher should learn that a low outside curve is a general weakness of most hitters.

CHAPTER 2

CATCHING

Many baseball authorities have discussed the much debated question "What player on a baseball team is the most important?" and the argument is still undecided. During the past few years, owners of major league baseball clubs have instructed their scouts to watch for promising young catchers. They report, however, that there are practically none to be found, while candidates for other positions are plentiful. This scarcity of catchers is the result, no doubt, of the fact that by its very nature the position is unattractive to young ball players. The catcher's importance is under-estimated, the position is generally poorly coached, and the chance for spectacular play almost nil.

Coaches and managers should realize that good teams are built around good batteries, and that a good receiver can make a winning team out of a mediocre pitching staff. They should realize the responsibility cast upon a young catcher and should give him all encouragement possible.

Catching Position.—After the signals are given, the catcher should come to a semi-standing position behind the plate. In arising, from the squat, he should be sure that he does not move his feet one way for one kind of a pitch and another way for a different pitch, and thus reveal battery signals to the opposition. A catcher should arise with a jump, placing both feet wide enough apart to give a well-balanced stance, but not so wide that he cannot shift quickly to either side or jump up if the ball is high. Although the young catcher will tend to stand flat footed or sway back on the heels, he should keep his weight slightly forward on the balls of his feet. Big League catchers stand as close as possible to the batter with the feet well spread and the left foot five or six inches in advance of the right (Diagram 132). This permits throwing to bases without undue footwork and is also a position suited to handling wild pitches. A catcher should never receive pitches while squatting on his heels, as he cannot shift for balls thrown wide or high, and he will not be in position to get a quick start on foul and bunted balls.

This semi-standing position of the catcher is very valuable to the pitcher, as the catcher's body forms an excellent target. His knees

mark the point for low inside and low outside pitches and the shoulders are the targets for the high inside or high outside strikes. Most catchers hold the mitt waist high in front for additional aid to the pitcher or they signal with the mitt, or the bare hand, the spot where the ball is to be pitched. Proper stance aids the catcher in receiving the pitches properly. (Figure 48).

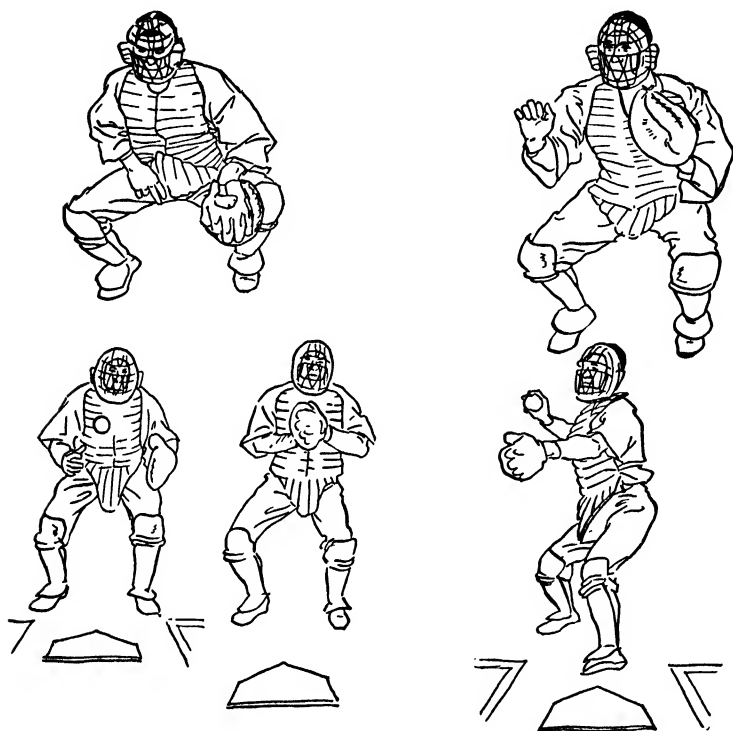


FIG. 48.—Catching technique. Signaling for the pitch (upper left), the "set" to receive the pitch (upper right), receiving the pitch (lower left and center), and the shift and arm-cock for the throw (lower right).

Receiving the Ball.—The catcher must learn to receive all pitches below the waist with the fingers pointing downward, and all above the waist with the fingers pointing upward. This method will lessen the possibility of injured fingers and will allow for faster and surer handling of the ball.

The fingers on the bare hand should be closed, but in a relaxed position with the thumb along the index finger. The hand should not be opened until the instant the ball strikes the catcher's mitt. Although some catchers advocate a tightly clenched fist, this practice is not recommended. If a foul tip strikes a relaxed fist, the injury will not be as severe as it would be if the hand were clenched tightly and there was no way for it to give with the impact of the ball.

Just as the ball strikes the mitt, the catcher should permit the mitt hand to "give" slightly. This action helps to reduce the force of the pitch. Simultaneous with the impact he should open his bare hand over the ball so he can grasp it and bring it immediately without any extra motion to a point behind his ear with his right arm cocked for the throw. At the same time the mitt hand remains in front of the body for balance. The catcher is now in position for a snap throw to the pitcher or to any base. Gus Mancuso of the New York Giants advocates picking the ball out of the catcher's mitt by moving the hand in back of the ball. He believes, if the hand is traveling in the same direction as the ball and a foul tip should strike the fingers, the joints will absorb the impact. In a majority of instances this would result in a bruise where otherwise the ball might meet locked joints and fracture them. This is an important point to teach young catchers. In addition to use of the hands the catcher must learn to shift his feet.

Shifting the Feet.—The catcher's footwork is an important factor in his defensive skill. Some inexperienced receivers are endowed with a fine throwing arm, but are handicapped by a clumsy pair of feet which seem to get tangled and crossed at the most inopportune moments. The beginner should make it a practice to shift in front of every pitched ball.

The catcher should use a slide or boxer's shift when moving to either side, and after jumping or reaching for high throws he should return immediately to the proper position for the throw (Diagram 132). On balls thrown to his right, he should step over with his right foot, and get his body in front of the pitched ball. As the ball strikes the mitt, he should jump shift by placing the right foot behind and the left foot forward in a perfectly balanced throwing position. Likewise on balls thrown to his left, he should step over with the left foot and place his body in front of the pitch. Again as he catches the ball, he should jump shift by placing the left forward and the right back ready for the throw. The body should be straightened and the weight well distributed. When the pitch is a strike the

regular shift is employed which involves merely the movement of the left foot into throwing position (Diagram 132).

This shifting of the feet is necessary to avoid the bat and to place the catcher into throwing position without any loss of time. On wild pitches and very bad throws the catcher should lunge or dive to block the ball. While stance, footwork, and receiving are all of extreme

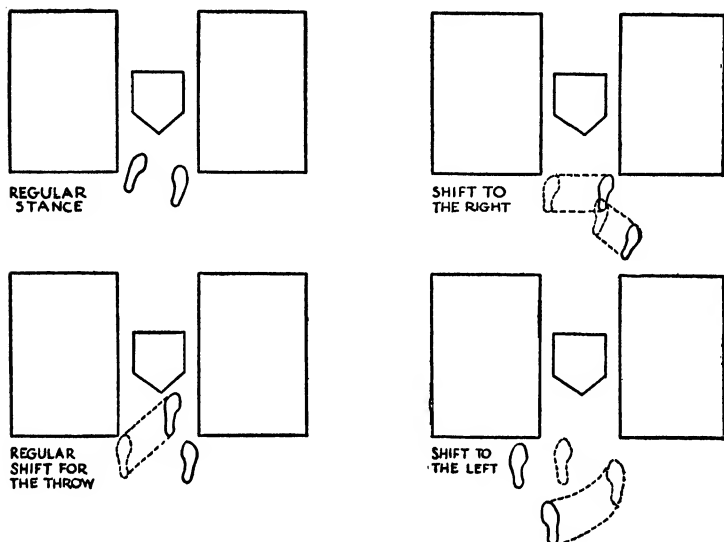


DIAGRAM 132.—The footwork of the catcher.

importance, no catcher ever became great unless he was expert at throwing to the bases.

Throwing to Bases.—A strong throwing arm is one of the most valuable assets of the catcher. As he receives the ball he should immediately shift his feet, and turn his body to the right. During the shift the mitt and ball are brought to the height of the chin. The ball is removed with the right hand and is held behind the ear with the arm cocked and ready for the throw. This action of the body and arm must be timed perfectly with the shift of the feet. As the arm and elbow move forward the latter acts as a pivot or fulcrum for the snap throw. The ball is brought forward by the hand and fingers over the elbow in a flat arc or straight line and they follow-through in the direction of the throw after the ball is released. By using the short

arm action and wrist-snap, the catcher can get his throws away much more quickly than he possibly could by employing the full arm swing of a pitcher.

If a left-handed batsman obstructs the catcher's vision to first base, he should move back until the base runner is in full view.

Inexperienced catchers should avoid the extra-step habit in throwing to bases. This practice may help the boy with an average arm to throw the ball a little swifter, but the time lost in stepping cannot be made up in this way. It is far more important to get the ball away quickly.

If the catcher is having trouble controlling his throw, it may be due to gripping the ball tighter with one finger than another. The wrist may be too rigid, or the stepping stride too long. The wrist-snap and accuracy should be developed by employing them constantly in returning the ball to the pitcher.

Catching Fly-Balls.—Many ball games are lost because the catcher has not acquired the skill of judging "pop flies." Beginners are easily fooled by these worming, twisting, frivolous objects which sometimes land ten feet away from their bewildered pursuer. The instant the ball leaves the bat, the catcher should determine the direction of the flight of the ball and run to its apparent dropping point. Many balls are dropped because the catcher has failed to get under the ball. It should not be necessary to reach for it. If the fly is high, the catcher will have a tendency to weave. This may be avoided by quickly looking at the ground and then at the ball again. The descending ball should be kept directly overhead, and, as it nears the catcher, he should step back and catch it in close, so that he does not have to reach for it.

Great care should be exercised in removing the mask so that it will not be stepped on in the attempt to get under the ball. The most rapid and effective method of removing the mask is to flick it off by catching the chin part of the mask in an upward stroke of the right thumb. When a low ball is hit near stands, the catcher should run to the obstacle, and then judge the ball. If this is not done, he is likely to stop short and the ball will fall free near the stand. Every catcher should learn that the spin imparted by the bat to a high foul causes the ball, as it falls, to curve outward toward the diamond and away from the stands.

The catcher should attempt to catch short fly-balls in the infield near the plate, and call to other fielders who should make catches farther out on the diamond.

Fielding Bunts.—The catcher should try to field all bunts that are within his reach, and he should go after them with the speed and determination of a tiger pouncing on his prey. The mask should be removed and the ball should be trailed to the left, so that proper position is established for the throw. He should never turn his back to the play. Consequently, if the bunt is toward third base, he should swerve to the third-base side of the ball facing first or second as the play indicates. The play to make depends upon the judgment of the catcher, unless the pitcher calls it for him. The mitt should be used to assist the ball into the throwing hand.

Backing-Up Plays.—Along with the catcher's heavy responsibilities of directing the defensive play and fielding fly balls and bunts, he must back-up first when the bases are unoccupied. If the catcher is alert, it may be possible in case of a bad throw or an error to hold the runner on first.

Tagging the Runner.—One of the chief responsibilities of a catcher is to guard the home plate, and prevent any attempt to score. This must be done in a scientific and determined manner. When a base runner approaches home plate, the catcher should take a position on the base line toward third base with his right foot about eighteen inches from the plate, and so placed that it will be next to impossible for the runner to slide home from the front. The left foot is placed up the base line a little and to the left. This position forces the runner around the catcher and should be used only when the catcher has the ball. It should not be taken, however, deliberately to block the runner when there is little chance of a put-out, as this policy will develop into headaches and bruises.

On force-out plays, when it is not necessary to tag the base runner, the left foot should be planted on home plate and after receiving the ball the catcher should pivot on the right foot and throw to first for a double play. This method brings the catcher clear of the plate and avoids contact and interference.

Signals.—The catcher, in reality, is the quarterback of the baseball team. He signals his battery mate for various kinds of pitches, and he flashes his intended throws to basemen, calls the play to his pitcher on bunts and otherwise directs the defensive strategy of his team. He is in a favorable position to do this since he faces the entire field of play. The number of signals should be cut to a minimum, and with the bases unoccupied, may be very simple. With a runner on second base, however, the signs must be concealed in such a manner that they cannot be picked up by the base runner and relayed to the batter.

In giving signals the catcher should squat in a position just out of range of the hitter's bat, and directly behind the plate, with his feet about eighteen inches apart. Distance in stance will vary according to the individual and his physical make-up. He should squat by sitting on his heels with his toes on the ground and his knees pointed out, though not too wide, as his legs must hide the signals from the third and first base coaching lines. This position prevents the opposition from stealing the battery signals. The left arm, hand, and mitt should be placed over his left knee in a relaxed position to help hide the signals from the third base coach. The right elbow should be pressed closely against the right side while the right hand should be held well back in the crotch for giving the signals. Care must be taken to prevent the movement of the elbow when finger manipulations are being made. This is often a give-away on signals. (Figure 48).

Signals must be given smoothly and clearly, to make certain that the pitcher and the second baseman or shortstop get them. If the keystone combination fails to get them, the cover assignment will go astray. In other words, each will be confused as to which one is to cover second base. Moreover, their "jump" or quick start on the batted ball will be lost. If the pitcher misses the sign, the catcher himself may be "crossed-up" and injured or credited with a passed ball.

There are many kinds of signals. Some catchers use the hands or fingers; others use the glove, feet, mask, protector. Some use a few in combination; others use all of them. The use of simple finger combinations is the best when second base is empty; when it is occupied by a base runner, a switch signal is indicated.

Hints to Catchers:

1. Wear adequate protective catching equipment.
2. Learn to analyze the strong and weak points of hitters.
3. Instill confidence in the pitcher.
4. Learn the ability of the pitchers and know their best pitch.
5. Have signs with the infielders and put on plays. Build up confidence by using these players and they are more likely to work in close ball games.
6. Throw to bases and teach base runners to respect the throwing arm. It is more difficult to catch an unaggressive player than an aggressive one.
7. Call for a "pitch-out" when there seems to be an opportunity for a play. If it is used too frequently without success, the pitcher will lose confidence.
8. Keep in mind the possibilities of a single steal, double steal, squeeze play, bunt, and hit and run.
9. Call for a fast ball as a general rule, when "ahead of the batter" and a curve or a change-of-pace when "behind the batter."

10. Do not use a change-of-pace on weak or late hitters. This is one pitch they will be ready for.

11. Call for a high inside pitch when the situation calls for a bunt.

12. Call for a high inside pitch, if it appears that a "hit-and-run" play is indicated. This will prevent the batter from hitting through the opening.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Why is the catcher so important to a ball club and why is his importance so often underestimated?
2. Describe in detail the stance of the catcher as he is about to receive the ball.
3. How does the experienced catcher receive pitched balls?
4. Explain and illustrate the catcher's footwork in shifting for the throw on strikes. On balls thrown to his right. On balls thrown to his left.
5. How and for what reason does the catcher's throwing motion differ from that of a pitcher?
6. Describe the technique of catching high foul "pop flies."
7. What is meant by the statement that in fielding bunts the catcher should never turn his back on the field of play?
8. How should the young catcher be taught to conceal his signals from the opposition?
9. Make a list of desirable hints to catchers.
10. What are the most frequent mistakes which are likely to be made by inexperienced catchers?

TEST QUESTIONS

- | | |
|-----|--|
| T F | 1. The catcher's throw to second base should be a full-arm pitcher's motion. |
| T F | 2. With one or more men on bases the catcher should constantly assume the throwing position on each pitched ball. |
| T F | 3. Hitters who step back and away from the plate are weak on pitches to the inside. |
| T F | 4. The right-handed batter who is a "dead left field hitter" should be given a fast ball on the inside corner of the plate. |
| T F | 5. The spin imparted by the bat to a high foul causes the ball as it falls to curve outward toward the diamond and away from the stands. |
| T F | 6. A catcher cannot legally block a base runner from the plate unless he has the ball. |
| T F | 7. The catcher should stand as close behind the plate as possible without interfering with the batsman. |
| T F | 8. In going to his right for a wide pitch the catcher should step first with his left foot. |
| T F | 9. The catcher should not use his gloved hand in fielding bunts. |
| T F | 10. The catcher should signal for a high inside pitch when the situation calls for a bunt. |

CHAPTER 3

FIRST BASE

The aspiring young ball player may not realize there has been a great change in first base play in recent years. Formerly, most any lumbering player who could not make the team at any other position would be assigned to play first base. Size, ability to catch thrown balls, and powerful hitting were the requirements. Today, these factors are still important but, in themselves, they are not sufficient.

Physical Qualifications.—Ability to catch thrown-balls is still the most important essential. No boy should attempt to become a first baseman who cannot learn to be a sure-catch of thrown-balls of all kinds. The first baseman should be a skilled, and preferably, a long distance hitter. Height is also desirable, but is not absolutely essential. Many men of medium height have become great players at this position.

In addition to the requirements which have long been expected of first baseman, speed, grace of movement, powerful and accurate throwing, accurate fielding of ground and fly balls, and quick thinking are as necessary as they are for any other infielder. He must show the same dexterity as his infield mates. Great players like George Sisler and Bill Terry had all these requisites of ideal first basemen. They could field, throw, and hit with uncanny skill, and ease, and grace of movement.

Both right- and left-handed players have become great first basemen. The left-hander probably has a slight advantage. He is in a better position to throw to second and third bases, particularly on ground balls and bunts. He is in position to get the ball away faster than a right-handed baseman. Naturally, he has an advantage on plays on his right. On the other hand, the right-handed first baseman has the advantages on throws to home plate and on plays to his left.

Catching Thrown Balls.—As was stated above the first baseman must be a sure catch of a thrown ball. He should use both hands whenever possible, but he must be able to catch with the gloved hand alone since he can reach farther for bad throws with one hand.

Footwork.—The footwork and shifting of position while keeping one foot on the bag for all kinds of throws must become automatic

and faultless. Constant practice of all possible stances for receiving every manner of throw will tend to make footwork a habit.

Before the ball is hit the baseman, under ordinary conditions, assumes a position approximately fifteen or twenty feet toward the outfield and fifteen feet from the base line. Of course, this position varies with the speed, and experience of the fielder himself, the speed of the batsman, and the state of the game.

When the ball is hit to one of the other infielders, the first baseman assumes a position in front of the bag and facing the teammate who is making the throw as in Figure 49. The feet should be spread

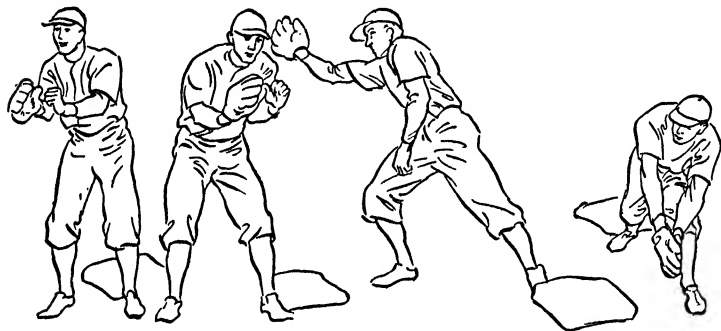
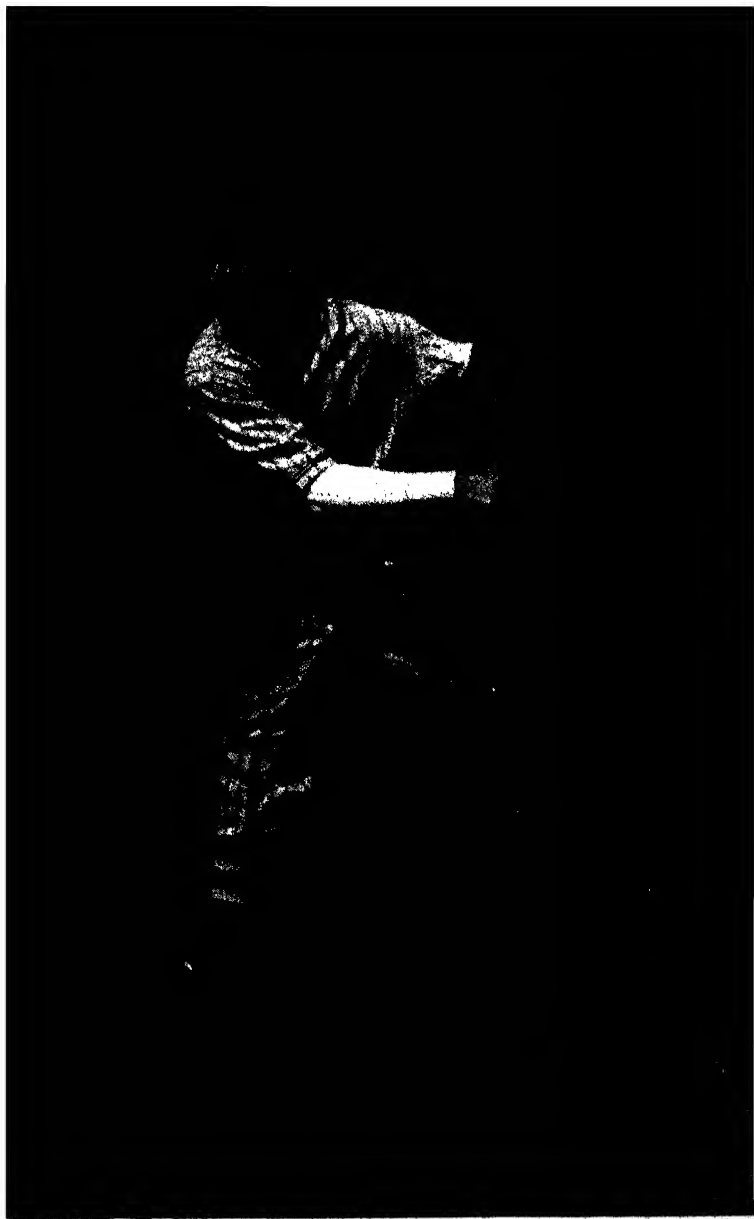


FIG. 49.—The first baseman in position to receive a throw: from the infield (left); from the vicinity of home plate (left-center); on his right (right-center); and on his left (right).

naturally with the heels close to and in front of the base. This permits the baseman to shift in any direction for the ball. If the throw is accurate and directly at the base, the footwork for a left-handed player is indicated in Figure 50. On the ordinary "stretch" it seems most natural for the left-handed first baseman to keep his left foot on the bag. On the other hand, the right-handed player usually prefers the right foot on the base. (Figure 49).

The Stretch.—Figure 50 shows the "stretch" of a left-handed player. By hours of practice in stretching the first baseman can shorten the throw by several feet, thereby greatly increasing the chances of retiring the runner. Star players, like Terry, actually do the "splits" in performing this feat. This is just another example of a fielding skill which may be acquired by a player who makes a study and an art of his job.

If the throw is to the baseman's right, he should shift to the right with his left toe touching the outside corner of the base and with his



"Pic" (PPG)



Keystone (FPG)

The catcher (Manager Hartnett, Chicago Cubs) who has the ball blocks the runner (Greenberg, of Detroit) from the plate.



Keystone (FPG)

right foot extended out toward right field for the "stretch" (Figure 49). Throws to the left of the base must be taken in just the opposite manner with the toe of the right foot touching the inside corner of the bag and the left leg extended toward home plate or the pitcher's box, as in Figure 49. The beginning first baseman is usually taught never to cross his legs in taking throws. There is at least one exception to this rule. Some left-handed first basemen, including some Big League stars, keep the left toe on the base on throws to the left, and cross the right leg over and extend it in the direction of the throw (Diagram 133). This is particularly true on a

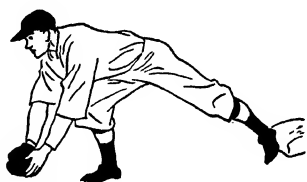


FIG. 50.—The "stretch" of the first baseman.

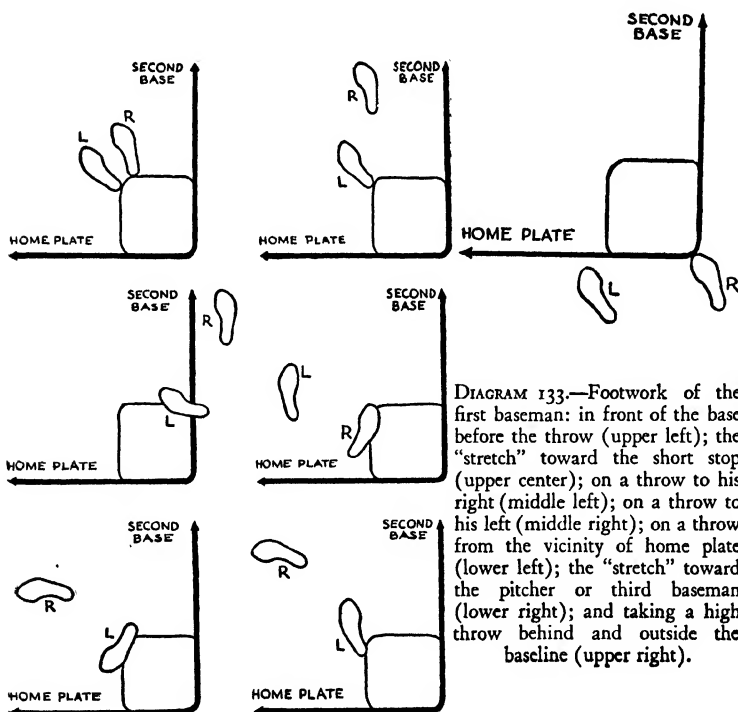


DIAGRAM 133.—Footwork of the first baseman: in front of the base before the throw (upper left); the "stretch" toward the short stop (upper center); on a throw to his right (middle left); on a throw to his left (middle right); on a throw from the vicinity of home plate (lower left); the "stretch" toward the pitcher or third baseman (lower right); and taking a high throw behind and outside the baseline (upper right).

play where the ball is thrown near the batsman approaching from home plate. The ball is received back handed.

Throws down the base line, or parallel to it, from the direction of home plate should be taken as shown in Figure 44. The baseman must stand off the base line, inside the diamond, with the left toe on the inside corner of the base and the right foot extended to meet the throw. This keeps him out of the path of the runner and shortens the length of the throw sufficiently to add many put-outs during a season.

High throws can frequently be taken behind the base (Diagram 133) with one foot remaining on the base. The advantage of this maneuver can readily be seen since the ball drops several inches in its flight. It would, therefore, be nearing the ground behind the base where it might actually be caught.

Playing the Ball.—While the ability to keep one foot on the base and stretch far in any direction is an absolute essential for every first baseman, playing the ball rather than the base is a basic rule which must never be forgotten. Make every effort to get the ball. If it gets by, the runner may gain one or more extra bases. After the ball is caught, knocked down, or blocked, there may still be time to touch the base or the runner. Novice players frequently make the mistake of reaching wide with the foot glued to the bag while the ball goes sailing past.

Playing Low Throws.—Low throws or “pick-ups” are the most difficult chances the first baseman is required to master. As was stated above, he must always be prepared to shift to meet any and every type of throw. If possible, he should stretch far out and attempt to take a low throw on a short hop near the ground. This is comparatively easy as is the real long bounce which gives him time to shift behind the base. The medium length bounce, of one or two feet, is extremely difficult to catch. He should make the try for it, always keeping in front of it to block it, and prevent it from getting by.

Fielding Ground and Fly Balls.—The first baseman should be able to field with the same skill as any other infielder. He should get in front of the ball and he should get down. So many young players forget to “bend the knees” as well as the hips. Fortunately, he frequently has time to get his man even if he does not field the ball cleanly. Fumbled balls which roll several feet away, may often be recovered with the throwing hand and tossed to the pitcher at the base in time for the put-out. If a force-play is to be made at either of the other bases, the ball must be fielded cleanly.

Ground balls to the right of the first baseman should be fielded by him if they are hard hit. Slow rollers, on the other hand, should be left to the second baseman.

Assists.—On force plays at second or third the left-handed player has an advantage. He should learn to make the throw without straightening up. He should receive the ground ball, step toward his target and release the ball all in one rhythmical, continuous motion.

The right-handed player must receive the ball, shift his feet as he turns toward the target, and then throw.

Assists to the Pitcher.—On all balls hit to his left the pitcher should be coached to start for first base. If the ball is hit to the first baseman, he must cover the bag. The path which he takes to the base is illustrated in Diagram 131. The play, first baseman to pitch, when well executed, is one of the prettiest plays in baseball.

The first baseman should field the ball and touch the base himself if he has time to make the play. He should avoid any unnecessary throws, since there is a chance of error every time the ball is handled. If there is insufficient time to make the play himself, he must toss the ball *underhand* to the pitcher. The ball should be tossed so the pitcher will receive it waist or chest high about one or two strides before he reaches the base. Pitchers preferences vary so it will be necessary to practice diligently with every pitcher on the team.

Fly Balls.—All fly balls which are in front or to his left should be taken by the first baseman. Those directly behind can usually be fielded more easily by the second baseman.

Fielding Bunts.—The first baseman must be adept at fielding bunts down the first base line. If a bunt is indicated on the play, he must come in fast for the ball leaving the base to be covered by the second baseman or pitcher. If he can reach the ball, he should shout "I have it." If the pitcher gets the ball, he should hurry back to the bag or get down out of the way of the play. (Diagram 134).

Fielding Positions.—As was stated above, the baseman should play approximately fifteen or twenty feet back toward the outfield and fifteen feet from the base line. The object is to cover as much ground as safely possible. The position must vary with the speed and

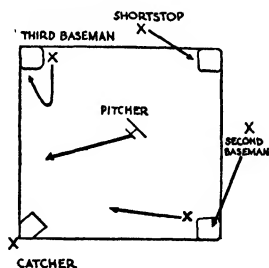


DIAGRAM 134.—The defense for a bunt with a runner on first and no outs.

experience of the fielder, the pitch, the style and speed of the hitter, and the game situation.

Playing the Hitter.—Playing the hitter in amateur baseball cannot be as accurate and scientific as it is in the professional game. In the first place, amateur teams do not play each other enough so all the strengths and weaknesses of opposing hitters can be learned. An amateur, too, may hit late on a pitch which the professional would “pull.”

The amateur first baseman, however, should know how to play for various hitters. He can play deeper, for instance, on slow runners and closer to the base on fast ones. A left-handed batsman is more likely to “pull” the ball in his direction, and is more likely to hit along the base line to his left than is a right-handed batsman. This type of batsman is also more apt to hit a slow ball or curve toward the right side of the diamond. The skilled right-handed batsman more frequently hits to some other baseman, but he may hit a fast ball, or any pitch on the outside of the plate toward first base.

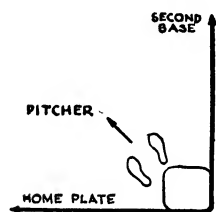


DIAGRAM 135.—The position of the first baseman with a runner on first base.

Runner on First.—With a runner on first with none, one, or two out, the first baseman should straddle the inside corner of the bag or stand somewhat to the left with the right foot at the inside corner of the bag and hold the runner close (Diagram 135).

Tagging.—Tagging the runner is done by allowing him to “tag himself.” The baseman must catch the ball and sweep it down to the second base corner of the bag, where the runner will slide into it, in attempting to get back to the base.

As the ball is pitched to the batter, he charges two or three steps into the diamond and toward second base to protect his territory. He must play in this relative position in anticipation of a bunt with runners on first and second or with a runner on second only. He must play the same way with the bases full and a force-out at home indicated.

He should play deep: with a runner on second or with runners on first and second and one or two outs; or with the bases full and two outs. If his team is several runs in the lead in the late innings of a game, his manager or coach will probably instruct him to play deep regardless of the outs or the number of runners on the bases.

Special Plays.—Some first basemen make no attempt to hold the runner close, unless he would make the tying or winning run. A



Keystone (FPG)

The first baseman shows how to tag the runner returning to first.



Keystone (FPG)

Note the footwork and "stretch" of the first baseman (Manager Terry, New York Giants) as he reaches for a wide throw.



Keystone (FPG)

medium position would be assumed with a man on first, eight or ten feet off the base and five or ten feet behind the runner.

With a man on first, or with first and second occupied, it is difficult for an experienced first baseman to field bunts fast enough for force plays at second or third. The ability to make this play is the sign of a master workman. Unless the novice anticipates the play and starts in early and fast, he should "play it safe" and get his man at first. The wise coach will probably teach this more conservative method, unless he has a Sisler or Terry in the making.

The duties of the first baseman in "backing up," "cut-offs" and "run-downs" are discussed in a subsequent chapter.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. What are the qualifications and characteristics of a good first baseman?
2. Explain the footwork of a first baseman in catching balls thrown directly at the base. Throws to his right. Throws to his left. Throws from home plate.
3. Explain the "stretch."
4. How should a first baseman play low throws?
5. Explain the technique of fielding ground balls, fly balls, and bunts.
6. Explain the technique of making an assist to the pitcher covering first base.
7. How should the first baseman tag a runner?
8. What should the first baseman know about "playing the hitter"?
9. How should the first baseman play with a runner on first with no outs, score tied, in the second inning? One out? Two outs? Would he play the base the same way in the ninth inning?
10. What are the duties of a first baseman on "run-down" plays?

TEST QUESTIONS

- | | |
|-----|---|
| T F | 1. A first baseman should receive all thrown balls with his right foot on the base. |
| T F | 2. A first baseman should crouch when about to receive a quick throw from a pitcher or second baseman in a position close to first base. |
| T F | 3. If the thrown ball comes to the right of the first baseman, he should extend the right foot, and touch the right outside corner of the base with the left toe. |
| T F | 4. The first baseman should catch thrown balls from near home plate with his right foot on the base. |
| T F | 5. With a runner on first, ninth inning, two outs, and a four-run lead the first baseman should remain on the base until the pitch. |

- T F 6. The footwork and shifting of position of a first baseman while keeping one foot on the bag for all kinds of throws must become automatic and faultless.
- T F 7. While the ability to keep one foot on the bag and stretch far in any direction is an absolute essential for every first baseman, playing the ball rather than the base is a basic rule which must never be forgotten.
- T F 8. On force plays at second or third base a right-handed first baseman has an advantage over a left-handed first baseman.
- T F 9. Slow ground balls, hit to the right of the first baseman should be left to the second baseman.
- T F 10. With a man on second it is difficult for an experienced first baseman to field bunts fast enough for a force play at third base.

CHAPTER 4

SECOND BASE

While a second baseman must possess very definite qualifications for his position it is not necessary that he be any particular physical type. Boys of widely differing physique have become excellent players. Whether large or small, however, it is imperative that he have a large and "sure" pair of hands with which to handle ground, fly, and thrown balls with ease and accuracy. Moreover, he must possess a keen mind and the ability to foresee play situations and act instantly, if he is to become a "star."

Fielding Ground Balls.—One of the most important duties of the "keystone" man is the fielding of ground balls. This should be done by taking the ball in front of the body, whenever possible, and in a natural moving stride. The hands should "give" slightly as the ball strikes the glove. Young players must learn to *stay close to the ground* by bending *at the knees* and hips with the feet comfortably spread. Inexperienced infielders so frequently fail to bend *at the knees* and get down *in the dirt* after the ball. (Figure 51).

The body should be kept low as it is much easier and quicker to come up, than go down, on bad hops. Both hands should be used with the fingers relaxed and pointing toward the ground. It is important that the palm of the gloved hand face the ball as it approaches. In other words, the gloved hand is behind and in the path of the ball while the bare hand clasps down over it the moment it strikes the glove. Beginning infielders who present the edges of the hands to the ball frequently allow it to "trickle" through for an error. It is very important that ground balls be trapped near the ground or handled at the height of the bounce. It is a mistake to "fight" the ball or take it on the long up-hop unless this is necessary to get it.

The speed of the bouncing ball must be accurately judged if the second baseman is to get all possible chances in his territory. If the ball is hit sharply, he must not start directly toward it but must move over in its path and intercept its flight.

The second baseman moves in line A rather than line B (Diagram 136.) On slow balls he must follow line C and he may need to make the play with one hand. If he fumbles the ball, he should pounce on it with the throwing hand as this method is much faster and surer

than the bad practice of picking up the ball with the gloved hand, and transferring it to the throwing hand. The eyes should *watch the ball*

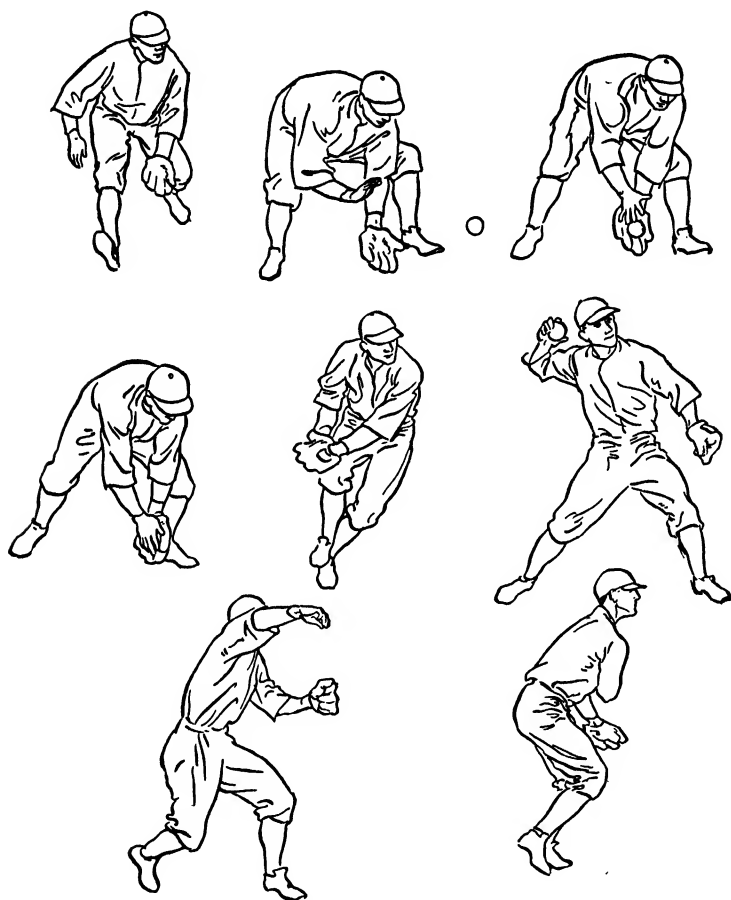


FIG. 51.—Fielding a ground ball. Note how the player stays close to the ground by bending *at the knees* and hips with the feet comfortably spread. Note also the position of the gloved hand in front of and under the ball.

right into the glove, but inexperienced players frequently look up while the ball is still several feet away.

Fielding Fly Balls.—The second baseman has occasion to catch many fly balls. There are several methods of making the play, but the

most acceptable one is that in which the hands are extended toward the ball well out in front of the eyes. Arms, hands, and fingers should be cupped and relaxed. Most errors on such plays are often directly attributable to the fact that the fielder fails to hasten to the spot where the ball is expected to fall. If he is sure he can get to the ball, he should call so that other players nearby will not run into him, since the first player to call has the right-of-way. He should judge the wind carefully and make proper allowance in its effect on the flight of the ball.

Covering the Base.—Young infielders often have difficulty maneuvering their feet in covering the base. The Big Leaguer straddles the bag. From this position he can go in any direction after the throw and he can also move his feet so he forces the base runner to slide into the ball.

Tagging Runners.—If the baseman straddles the bag, he really does not need to tag the runner. *He lets the runner tag himself.* He should catch the ball and hold it in the gloved hand near the ground in front of the base while the base runner slides into it.

Catching the ball and putting it down should all be done in one continuous motion, as the fraction of a second saved may be the difference between a stolen base or a put-out. Reaching for the runner should be avoided as the baseman may be deceived by a clever slide. (Figure 52).

Trapping Base Runners.—The second baseman will have many opportunities to participate in "run-down" plays in which a base runner has been "trapped" between first and second or second and third. If he handles the ball, he should run at top speed toward the base runner and drive him back toward the base from which he came. If unable to make the "tag" himself, he should throw to the baseman just before the runner reaches the base. Skilled players do not chase the base runner up and down the base line or throw the ball back and forth to one another. One play should result in a put-out. This minimum handling of the ball not only prevents many misplays, but it saves time and prevents other runners from advancing during the "run-down."

Executing Double Plays.—One of the best ways to judge the ability of a second baseman is his skill in executing double plays. Not all plays that show signs of becoming double plays will prove to be

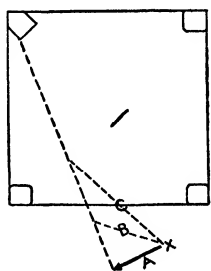


DIAGRAM 136.—The direction of movement of the second baseman in fielding: a hard hit ground ball (A); a medium speed ground ball (B); and a slow rolling ground ball (C).

such in the long run, unless certain factors are taken into account. In the first place, the ball must be fielded cleanly. In addition, the second baseman must be able to field the ball, pivot, and throw in one motion. He must also judge accurately the speed of the ball, the base runner, and the batsman. If the ball is hit sharply and the runners are slow footed, the chances for completing a double play are excellent.

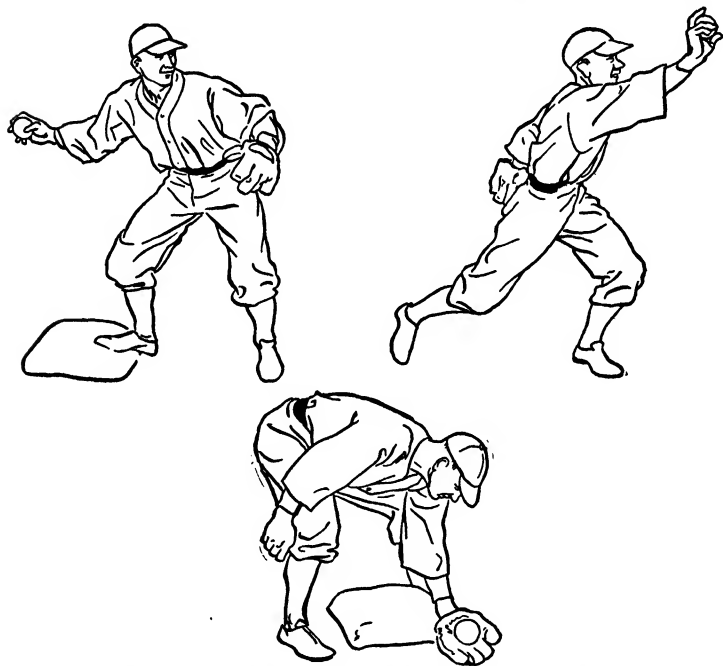


FIG. 52.—Tagging the runner or forcing the runner to tag himself (lower). The baseman straddles the bag. In the upper picture the second baseman touches the bag with his right foot and throws to first base.

On the contrary, if the runners are fast and the ball is slow, it may be unwise to attempt the play.

When the ground ball is hit near second base it may be *scooped* to the shortstop with two hands. If, however, it is twenty or thirty feet from second base, he should *throw* the ball to the shortstop at shoulder height. This makes for greater ease and speed on the part of the shortstop in getting the ball away. The second baseman should field the ball in front, pivot to the right by a quick shift of the feet

so that he is facing second base, and throw with a side or under-arm motion to the shortstop. He should not turn around to the left to make the play as this method requires him to take his eyes off the target.

Frequently, he may field the ball near second, touch the base, and throw the ball to first himself. At other times, it is possible to tag the base runner and complete the throw to first. (Figure 52).

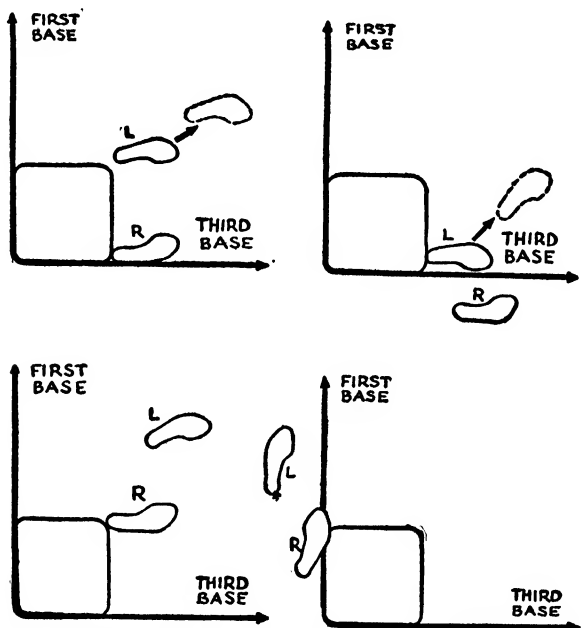


DIAGRAM 137.—The footwork of the second baseman in pivoting on double plays. Covering on the inside and toward the third base side of the bag (upper left); receiving the ball to his right and pivoting for the throw (upper right); pivoting *inside* the diamond (lower left); and pivoting *outside* the baseline (lower right).

Footwork in Pivoting on Double Plays.—On many occasions the second baseman acts as pivot man on double play balls hit to the shortstop or third baseman. The minute he senses the play he should rush to cover second base. He should station himself on the inside of the bag facing third or short with each heel touching a corner of the bag (Diagram 137). If the throw is good, he kicks the bag as he catches

the ball and steps out into the diamond toward the pitcher's box with the left foot and makes the throw to first. This action not only takes the baseman out of the path of the runner approaching from first so the throw is easier, but collisions and injuries are also avoided. Little Hughie Critz, former second baseman of the New York Giants, added many years to his playing career by employing this method. Usually the play is so fast the second baseman catches the ball and tags the bag with one foot as he crosses it, and steps into the diamond to pivot for the throw. If the ball is to his right, he should shift his feet much as a first baseman, touch the bag with the left foot, and then step into the diamond for the throw (Diagram 137). Likewise, if the throw is to his left, he should shift left, kick the base with the right toe, and pivot on the left foot for the throw to first. Occasionally, it may be necessary for him to pivot outside the base line as indicated in Diagram 137, but in any event he should be versatile enough to catch the ball, touch the base with either foot, and get the ball away in one rapid and continuous motion free from interference from the base runner. Hours of practice will develop proficiency in this important maneuver.

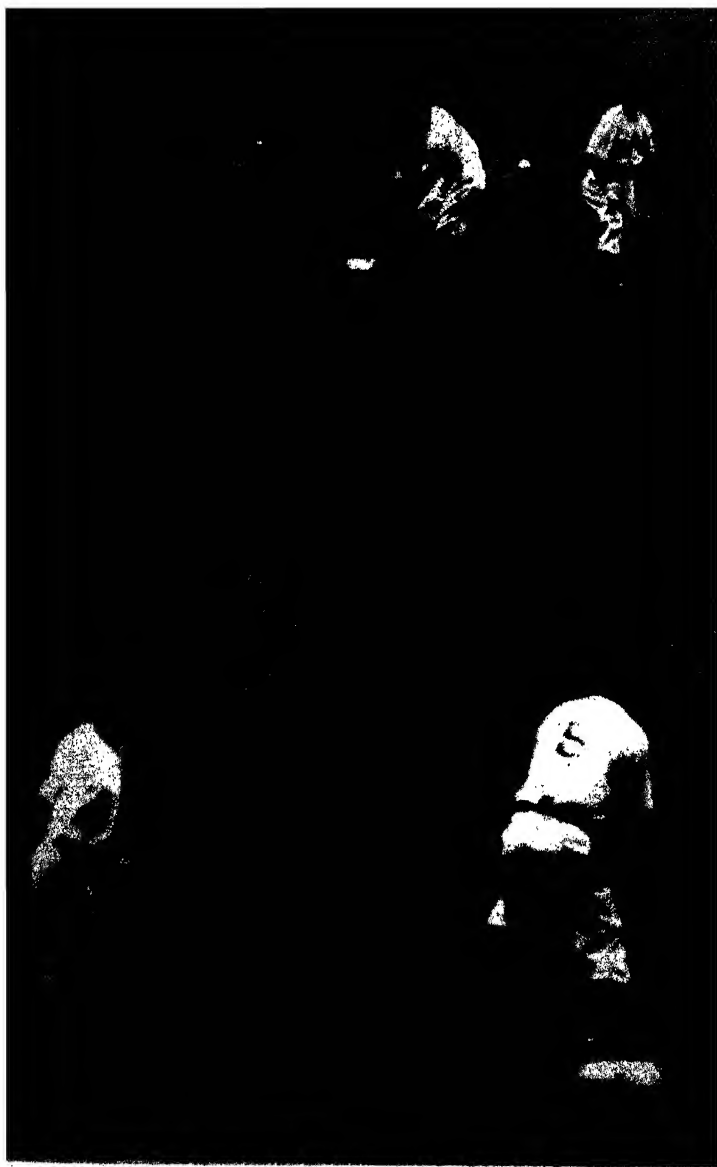
Covering on the Sacrifice Bunt.—With a runner on first base and a sacrifice bunt anticipated, the second baseman should move up a few paces toward the batter and over a few feet closer to first base. This slight change of position will make it possible for him to get to the base ahead of the batsman, if he is alert and gets a quick start. His footwork in taking the throw is similar to that described for the first baseman. (Diagram 134).

Playing the Double Steal.—The play of the second baseman or shortstop on double steals is one of the most difficult to execute in baseball. From high school up through the major leagues it is a gamble. The two most common ways of handling this play are as follows: (1) by using two men with a long and short cut-off throw, and (2) by using one man.

There are several points which must be observed during such plays. First of all, there will be runners on first and third base. The base runners start to move with the pitch and there are several things they may do.

1. The man on first may try for second, either on a steal or the "hit and run" play, while the man on third holds his base.

2. The man on third may co-operate with the man on first, and if the catcher throws through to second base, the man on third will try for home instantly.



KeyStone (FPG)

A right handed first baseman (Greenberg, Detroit) shows his footwork on a...
double-play ball from second.



Keystone (FPG)

The first baseman (Cavarretta, Chicago Cubs) shows the proper position and footwork *inside the baseline* on a throw from the pitcher or catcher.



Keystone (FPG)

3. The man on third may wait until the ball goes through to second base, or until the man on first is caught in a chase, and then start for home.

4. A delayed steal may be made. For instance: As the catcher methodically throws back to the pitcher, the runner on first starts for second the instant the ball is about to be released, and the man on third heads for home.

These plays, which are really all one play, are very trying and demand close observation. The second baseman should look for the "hit and run" if the chances are favorable for its use. He should signal the shortstop to cover second so he may have more time to remain in his position.

On the first play, the catcher should look or feint at the runner on third and throw through to second as if to catch the steal. The shortstop or second baseman (as agreed upon) runs to a position between second and the pitcher's box and about ten feet in front of second base. If the man on third is not advancing or has not moved, he permits the catcher's throw to go through into the hands of the teammate on second base.

On plays two and three, the same preliminary steps are taken, but the shortstop or second baseman, as the case may be, cuts off the throw of the catcher in number two and lets it go by in number three.

In number four, the play depends on the catcher. If he gets into the habit of methodically throwing back to the pitcher without watching the base runners, it is a hard play to stop. The play would be the same as number two and number three, depending on the runners and the action of the catcher.

Most Big League ball teams use only one man to handle the ball at second, on such plays. The man making the play should come close to second, receive the throw there and play the runner coming from first, or he should move in fast and play the man going home from third. Professional players feel that using one man in the play minimizes the chance of a slip. Moreover, if two men cover on the play two infield positions are left open, as the men in this play must start with the runner. The coach and his players must decide which type to use but the play involving only the one man would appear to be better for amateur teams.

Relaying Throws.—On extra base hits to right or right center field the alert second baseman should go well out into right field and relay the ball from the right or center fielder back to the proper base. On such plays, the shortstop or first baseman should act as "guide" and

should call to the second baseman where the relay ball should be thrown. To successfully execute this play the second baseman must have a strong and accurate throwing arm.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. What type of physique should a boy possess to become a skillful second baseman?
2. Should the feet be together or separated in a natural stride in fielding ground balls?
3. Why is it so important for infielders to *bend at the knees* in fielding ground balls?
4. How should the gloved hand be held in fielding a ground ball?
5. Show by diagram how the second baseman should move toward slow moving and fast moving ground balls.
6. What is the technique of quickly recovering a fumbled ball?
7. What hints should be given the second baseman in fielding fly balls?
8. Give reasons why baseman should straddle the base to receive a throw before tagging a base runner.
9. What is meant by the statement, "let the base runner tag himself"?
10. Explain in detail the footwork of the second baseman in pivoting on double plays.

TEST QUESTIONS

- | | |
|-----|---|
| T F | 1. Since it is more natural the second baseman should be taught to keep his feet together in fielding ground balls. |
| T F | 2. In fielding ground balls an infielder should not bend his knees. |
| T F | 3. An infielder should recover a fumbled ball with his gloved hand. |
| T F | 4. On a base-hit to right field the second baseman should back up the shortstop who covers second. |
| T F | 5. On a double play, short to second to first, the second baseman should be able to touch the bag with either foot, if necessary. |
| T F | 6. With a right-handed hitter at bat the second baseman ordinarily covers second when the base runner on first attempts to steal second base. |
| T F | 7. With a runner on first and a bunt anticipated the second baseman should move up and over toward first base. |
| T F | 8. Correct fielding form cannot be taught. |
| T F | 9. Ground balls should be trapped near the ground or handled at the height of the bounce. |
| T F | 10. Amateur teams should use only one man, either the shortstop or the second baseman, in handling the ball on double steal plays. |

CHAPTER 5

SHORTSTOP

The ability to play shortstop, like the skill required of a second baseman, does not depend upon any special type of physical characteristics. The main qualifications include an alert mind, ability to start quickly, a large pair of hands, and a strong throwing arm. The shortstop should be the type of a fellow who has the knack of being in the right spot at the right time. He should be a born rover, moving here, backing up there, so that he invariably is in the play.

Position for Fielding Ground Balls.—The normal playing position of the shortstop is approximately ten yards to the left of second base. This distance will vary according to the batter and the tactical situation. The starting position of a shortstop, or any other infielder for that matter, is a very important fundamental. He should assume a natural relaxed position, bend at the knees and hips, and lean slightly forward with the weight on the balls of the feet. The space between the feet should be approximately eighteen inches. Usually the infielder's first move is with the foot nearest the ball and is more of a shift than a step. The speed of the first step is an indication of ability to cover ground. A shortstop must be able to move quickly in any direction and retain perfect balance and co-ordination.

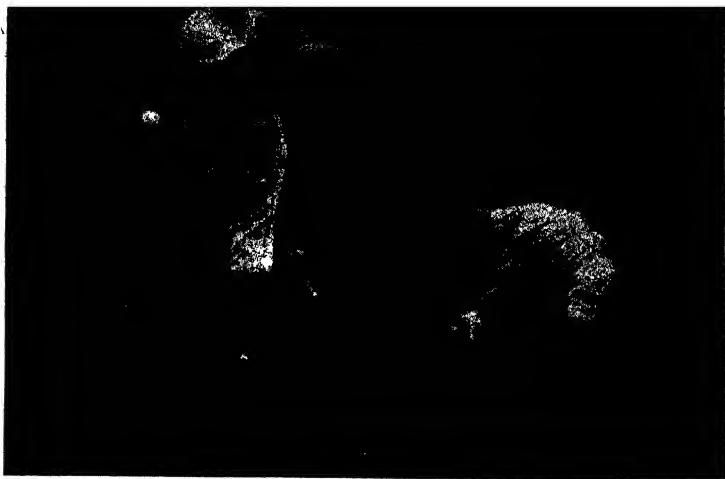
Fielding Ground Balls.—The ball should be fielded as it nears the top of the arc, or on the short pick-up as it comes off the ground. It should be played far enough in front of the body to allow the eyes to follow it into the glove. This permits the fielder, if he misses the ball, to retrieve it in front instead of behind. The infielder should "play the ball" at all times, and never let it play him. In other words, he should not "fight" the ball or attempt to take it on the long up-hop. Furthermore, he should let his hands "give" slightly at impact. Since the shortstop has many long throws to make, he must field the ball, and get it away all in one smooth, continuous motion. (Figure 51).

Co-ordination Play Around Second.—If the shortstop is to develop into a truly great player he will need a fine second baseman with whom to work. These two players have so much in common they should seem to function as one. The second baseman is in reality another shortstop, and the shortstop is certainly just as much a second

baseman as the player who goes by that name. It is difficult to recall more than three or four plays around second base that do not involve both players. All during the game, these two "keystone" players should co-operate continuously. They should have pre-arranged signals between themselves, and with the first and third basemen on all fly balls and base hits to the outfield. With a man on first and a bunt anticipated each second base guardian should signal the other his intentions so there will be no slip in the assignments. The same caution should be taken with men on first and second; first and third; and first, second and third.

Throwing.—A good shortstop must be able to throw from any and all positions in which he may receive the ball. It is imperative that he have a strong and accurate arm to enable him to make throws from the deep position, from the short position in on the grass, and from either side. It is advisable to throw the ball in an overhand manner whenever possible. This form is more accurate and the throw is a great deal easier for the receiving player to handle. The ball is held rather lightly with the first and second fingers on top and the thumb underneath much in the same manner that the pitcher holds his fast ball as described in a previous chapter. The ball should be released off the tips of the two fingers. While it is true the shortstop should be able to throw from any position, he should avoid awkward ones, and should make his play from a well balanced position, whenever possible. Proper timing gives correct balance and position. It is usually bad practice to attempt to aim the ball when throwing, as this may cause tension, and like pressing in golf, tends to make the throw inaccurate. The shortstop should try to develop a quick, hard, accurate throw and then keep using it. The important thing is the speed with which the ball is gotten away rather than the speed of the throw. The ball should not be lobbed or tossed. A wrist snap and underhand throw should be developed for double play balls and slow ground balls which must be fielded up toward the pitcher's box. This phase of shortstop play requires hours of practice to perfect.

Covering the Base.—Covering bases on throws from the catcher requires a definite knowledge of fundamentals. With a man on first base, the shortstop should make his start to cover second when the base runner starts his steal, providing, of course, he is the one to make the play. He should straddle the base, hooking the left foot on the outside corner as he faces first base, thus forcing the runner to the inside, if possible. He should hold the ball in the gloved hand on the ground at the edge of the base and allow the runner to slide into it, tagging.



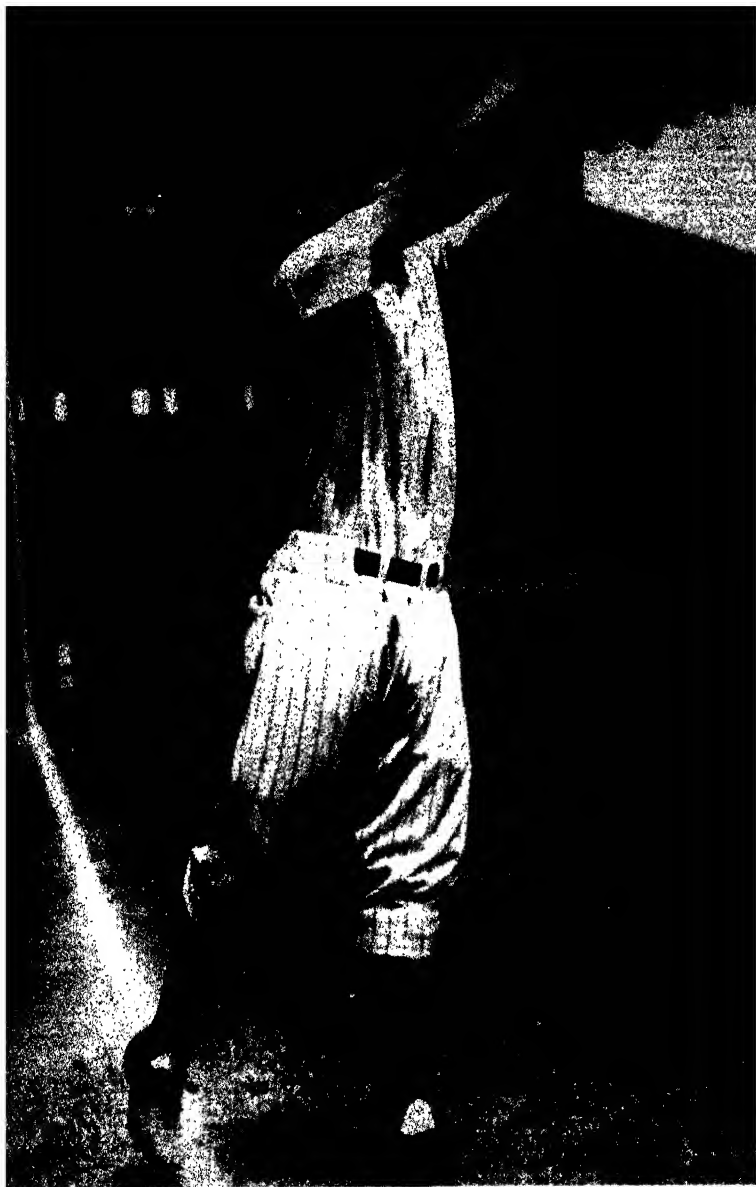
Keystone (FPG)

The second baseman (Lazzeri, New York Yankees) shows how he pivots and throws the ball to first *from inside the baseline* on a double play third, to second, to first



Keystone (FPG)

The third baseman demonstrates the proper method of tagging a runner by forcing the latter to "tag himself." Note, also, the position of hands, arms, and legs of the runner in the "hook" slide.



Keystone (PPG)

The outfielder shows the proper method of catching an outfield fly.

himself out. It is important that he learn what type of pitch is to be made, fast or curve ball, inside or outside, so he will know whether he or the second baseman should cover second base on the play. If, for example, with a man on first, a right-handed hitter at bat, and a curve ball to be pitched, the shortstop should know the chances are great that the batsman will hit into his territory. The second baseman, therefore, should cover second base on the play. On the other hand, if a fast ball is pitched under similar circumstances, it is likely to be hit near the base or into the second baseman's territory, and the shortstop should cover second base. According to the law of averages in baseball, a majority of curve balls and slow balls will be batted into a certain territory. Likewise, most fast balls and position pitches will be hit so they follow a rather definite course. Obviously, these pitches are hit elsewhere at times but Big Leaguers play "percentage" baseball. A definite knowledge of batters and pitchers must be taken into consideration along with the "percentage" plan. In colleges and high schools there is very little chance of determining the strength and weaknesses of opponents because they are seen so infrequently. For this reason, it is usually best to play in the orthodox positions. In professional baseball, however, opposing players are carefully analyzed over a number of years. Pitchers are ordered to pitch to their strength or weakness and the entire team moves to make the play.

Holding a Runner on Base.—Every effort should be made to hold men on bases and to cut down the total number of bases stolen. With a man on second base, the shortstop should permit the runner to take a comfortable lead. He should then move in cautiously until he gets nearly behind the runner before he breaks for the base to receive the throw. Signals should be pre-arranged with the pitcher. After the shortstop signals, the pitcher should count three, then turn quickly and throw about waist high to the third base side of the bag. The shortstop should be there ready to make the put-out. Frequently, it is inadvisable to risk a throw, in which case, the pitcher or shortstop should fake the runner back.

Position Play at Shortstop.—The shortstop should take the batter and his throwing arm into consideration and play accordingly. When the situation permits him to play as deep as the arm will allow, he should protect his weak side. Since it is usually easier to cover ground toward the gloved hand, he should play wide toward the bare-hand side. A shortstop should always be thinking ahead of the play. He must know the peculiarities of the hitter, the ball to be pitched, the number of outs, the score, the inning, the strength of men coming to

bat, the opponents' pitching and fielding strength, the speed of base runners, and wind conditions, among other things. Unlimited time should be spent in practicing the fielding of ground and fly balls. Skill should be developed in going to the right and left, and in getting into position to throw instantly and accurately. He should be adept at going in on slow hit balls and in throwing them instantly, by using a snap throw of the wrist and forearm. Furthermore, he should be able to go into the outfield and catch any fly which falls between him and the outfielders. He is a key man on "run-down" plays between bases. He should always force the runner back to his original base to be tagged

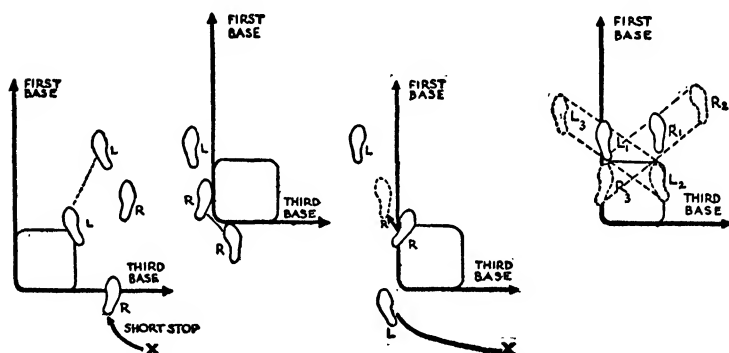


DIAGRAM 138.—The footwork of the short stop in executing double plays: while receiving the throw on the third base side of the bag (left); while receiving the throw on the right field side of the bag (center right); by stepping behind or toward the center field side of second base with the right foot and dragging it across the bag (center left); and shifting the feet (right).

out in the manner described for second baseman in the previous chapter. This play should be completed as fast as possible, because the other runners usually start to advance the instant a runner is trapped, and by quick work two men may be put out.

In addition to his fielding skills the shortstop should know the ball to be pitched and should be watchful for other information necessary to help the outfielders play for the batter.

Double Plays.—The double play revolving around second base is one of the most spectacular in baseball. On the play from second, to short, to first, the second baseman should toss the ball about even with the left shoulder of the shortstop. The latter should touch the base with his right foot, pivot on the left, and throw off the right foot at the finish of a shuffle-pivot movement (Diagram 138). Bartell of the

Giants favors this method. At times the ball should be thrown to the inside of the runner. In that case, the shortstop should touch the bag with the left foot, pivot instantly to the inside and throw off the right foot. Occasionally, he may not be in position to follow this method and under these circumstances he must get the ball away as best he can. Cronin of Boston likes to step just behind the base with his right foot and drag it across the bag as he makes the play (Diagram 138).

Dick Bartell of the New York Giants uses a method which few shortstops are able to employ. He takes an extra step beyond the base and to the outside, but gets fine results. In his method there would be some doubt of the ability of a less agile and less skillful player to touch the base.

Playing Bunts.—With no outs and the score close in the late innings of a ball game, and under certain other tactical situations, the shortstop may expect a bunt with first base occupied. On this play the shortstop normally covers second base, and the second baseman covers first for the put-out. With first and second occupied, where the situation calls for advancing the runners, the shortstop should play close to second, making it difficult for the man on second to get a substantial lead. The idea in this situation is to force the base runner at third. (Diagram 134).

The Bluff Throw.—The bluff throw is a fine defensive weapon for alert players. If the bases are occupied, it can be used effectively on slow infield hits or after the ball has been juggled or dropped. The infielder should hastily pick up the ball and go through the regular motion of throwing to the intended base. He should hold on to the ball, however, check the pretended throw, and make the throw to a base where a runner has just arrived. The runner can frequently be trapped as he rounds the base, or he may be tagged if he fails to slide.

Relaying the Ball.—One of the most important assignments of the shortstop is that of relaying long fly balls and base hits from the outfielders to the infield. On a long hit to left or left centerfield he stations himself out between the infield and outfield and in line with the play to third or home. On hits to right or right centerfield, with a runner on first, the shortstop should station himself twenty to thirty feet from third base and in line with the throw to that base. This places him in a position to "cut-off" the throw, if it is too late to get the runner at third, for a possible put-out of the batsman at second base. On short hits to left field he should cover third base and on short hits to right, he should cover second.

In conclusion, it should be stated that since shortstop is one of the most difficult positions to play on a ball club, the aspirant for this job must feel confidence in his ability to succeed. Proper mental attitude is as essential as mechanical perfection, for if the shortstop errs and the best of them do make errors, he should have the courage to go after the next one with added enthusiasm and determination.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. How do the qualifications of a shortstop differ from those of a second or third baseman?
2. What is the normal fielding position of the shortstop?
3. Which foot should the shortstop move first in starting for a ground ball to his left?
4. What is meant by "playing the ball" on ground balls? What is meant by "fighting the ball"?
5. Is the overhand, sidearm, or underhand throw recommended for shortstops?
6. Explain the technique of covering the base and tagging the base runner.
7. Explain the meaning of "percentage" baseball and show how this affects the play of the shortstop.
8. Explain the method the pitcher and shortstop should employ to hold a runner on second base.
9. Describe in detail the footwork of a shortstop in acting as pivot man on double plays.
10. Explain the duties of the shortstop on long and short base hits to the various outfields.

TEST QUESTIONS

- | | |
|-----|---|
| T F | 1. In throwing the ball, infielders should release it over the inside of the index fingers. |
| T F | 2. If possible, on a double play from second to short to first the shortstop should touch the base with his right foot. |
| T F | 3. It is faulty technique for the shortstop to straddle the base in taking the catcher's throw, when the runner on first attempts to steal second. |
| T F | 4. Ordinarily, it is good baseball for the shortstop to cover second on an attempted steal of second with a right-handed hitter at bat. |
| T F | 5. With a runner on first and a bunt anticipated the shortstop should cover second base. |
| T F | 6. On a long hit to right field with a runner on first the shortstop should place himself about thirty feet from third and in line with the throw so he may "cut-off" the throw and get the batsman at second, if the third baseman calls for him to do so. |
| T F | 7. In fielding ground balls the gloved hand should be underneath with palm up, and the bare hand should be on top with palm down. |

- T F 8. Infielders should be taught to watch ground, thrown and fly balls until the ball actually reaches the hands.
- T F 9. The infielder's first move toward a ground ball to his side should be with the foot nearest the ball.
- T F 10. On short base hits to right field the shortstop should back-up the second baseman who covers second base.

CHAPTER 6

THIRD BASE

In this era of heavy hitting it has been facetiously said in professional baseball, that the third baseman should be required to pay to get into the ball park and play on the team. This remark was caused by the fact that he has less territory to cover and fewer chances to handle, per game, than his teammates on the infield. But many of the chances that come his way are very difficult, indeed, to handle.

Playing Ground Balls.—The third baseman is probably called upon to field a wider variety of batted balls than any other infielder. The term "hot corner" commonly applied to this position is truly a significant one. He must handle the swiftest as well as the slowest of batted balls. Many a ball is hit at him with such tremendous speed, in this day of the free swinger, he must judge it in an instant and field it cleanly or he will fail to get his man at first base and he may actually be injured on the play. It is his duty to block or knock down hard hit balls which he cannot field cleanly and throw out the runner if at all possible. This takes courage as well as skill and the knowledge of where to play in relation to the base. (Figure 45).

On the other hand, he must be alert for "topped" balls or ones which skid, curve, twist, or hop badly. These are often due to poor timing of the swing by the batter and are more prevalent in high school, college, and sand-lot baseball, where hitters are not as skillful as they are in professional ranks. Moreover, the sacrifice bunt and the "squeeze" play are employed more by amateur teams. These plays, like the slow rolling "topped" ball, place an added burden on the third baseman. He must have the ability to come in fast on the ball and throw accurately while running at full speed. He should field with both hands, whenever possible, but he must be able to play them with one or both hands from any and all positions. It is readily seen that one characteristic which a player must possess to qualify for this position is a great throwing arm.

Throwing.—He has longer and more difficult throws to make than any other infielder except the shortstop. He should throw overhand on all plays possible, since it is a more accurate throw and it is also easier to handle on the receiving end. It will be used most on hard

hit ground balls directly at him or to his right and on relays and double play balls whether he throws to first, second, or home plate.

On bunts and slow rollers in front of him and on slow hit balls to his left he must throw the instant he fields the ball by using an under-hand wrist snap and forearm throw. By patient practice he should learn to make this throw from any and all positions.

He should aim his throws, as should his teammates, about letter or shoulder high on double play, waist high on put-outs, and about a foot above the base if a base runner is to be tagged.

The "bluff" throw, which was described for the shortstop, is probably used more effectively by the third baseman, than by any other player, because there are so many plays where he has the opportunity to put it into practice.

Territorial Responsibility.—In this day of the fast ball and hard hitting, third basemen are playing closer to the base line and farther back than they formerly did. Naturally, he moves up or back and over toward second, or out nearer the base line, depending on the tactical situation and the type of hitter at bat. He is responsible for hard-hit balls to either side as far as he can reach, and he must handle bunts and slow rollers which just creep by the pitcher. Furthermore, he should call for all fly balls near the pitcher's mound and between third base and home plate. It is usually advisable, however, for the shortstop to take "Texas Leaguers" or fly balls back of third, as he is in better position to get at the ball, and ordinarily he will be facing the infield when he makes the put-out.

Diagnosing Tactical Situations.—Due to the short distance the third baseman plays from home base, and the long distances to first and second, he is called upon perhaps more than any other player to diagnose quickly and accurately many tactical situations.

Along with the other infielders he must consider the outs, the score, the inning, the hitter, the base runners, the pitcher, the wind, and certain other factors.

With the bases empty and less than two out, he should play about even with the base line against most batters, and particularly against left-handed hitters. The distance he plays from the base will depend upon whether or not the batsman is right- or left-handed, a slow or a "pull" hitter, a slow or a fast runner, and whether or not the pitcher throws a fast or a curve ball, and inside or outside.

The third baseman should ordinarily expect a bunt with a light hitter at bat, a man on first, and less than two outs. He should call to the pitcher and the other teammates even though they have already

sensed the play, as this makes for better teamwork. In this situation he should be in and be ready to get to the ball as fast as possible. If the runner is held close to first, a play at second may be successful, although inexperienced players should "play safe" and get the man at first, rather than fail to get either base runner. (Diagram 134).

With second as well as first base occupied in a situation similar to the one above, the third baseman should play close to his base prepared to field any hard hit bunt. If it is an ordinary bunt toward third base, however, the pitcher should field it and the third baseman should cover his base. On well-drilled ball clubs the catcher calls this play, since he faces the field, and the play is in front of him. The pitcher should throw to the base called by his battery mate. If the bunt is to the pitcher's left, the first baseman should field it.

On "squeeze" plays the responsibility of diagnosing the situation again falls upon the third baseman in addition to the pitcher and catcher. The play will work only when these players are caught off guard. The situation calling for a "squeeze" is obvious, to experienced players. It is most likely to arise with one run needed, and a light hitter at the plate, and with one out or no outs. If the play is anticipated the pitcher should "waste" the pitch by throwing it too wide or too close to be bunted. If the ball is bunted, the player who fields it, pitcher, first baseman, or third baseman, must pick it up with the bare hand, and throw it to the catcher without straightening up with a quick underhand wrist snap.

Defense Against Double Steals.—With runners on first and third and a double steal likely, a clever third baseman can frequently "bluff" the opponent back to third by a word or a move. This may so delay the runner's start he may be caught at home. He should be alert for a throw from the catcher who may "bluff" a throw to second but throw to third instead.

Covering the Base.—The third baseman should straddle his bag, face the play, and force the base runner to tag himself as described for the second baseman and shortstop. On base-hits to the outfield, with a man on first, a play will usually be made for the base runner at third base. Since the ball approaches behind the runner he can often be deceived by a clever baseman if he will stand relaxed as though no play were to be made until the very last instant before the ball arrives. If the runner slows up or fails to slide, he may be tagged even though he ordinarily would have beaten the ball. (Diagram 139).

On long sacrifice fly balls to the outfield with a man on third waiting to score after the catch Red Rolfe, third baseman of the New

York Yankees, has a clever trick of keeping the runner on the bag until the ball is actually caught. Rolfe stands in a position near the base pointing to the runner's foot on the bag and watching the catch in the outfield. This ingenious bit of detective work tends to keep an ambitious runner, who might otherwise be tempted to start his mad dash for home a few seconds early, on the base until the ball is in the outfielder's hands. Moreover, if the umpire is a little lax and permits base runners to "jump the gun," this strategy may cause him to be more alert and exacting on the play.

"Cut-off" Plays.—Some managers and coaches use the third baseman, while others use the first baseman, to "cut-off" the throw home from the outfield which is too late to get the man scoring. Manager Terry of the New York Giants uses the first baseman and makes certain that all bases are covered by fielders. Other managers leave first base open and have the third baseman "cut-off" on his side of the diamond. On this play he should "line up" with the throw home. If the ball is too late to catch the runner going home, the catcher should call to the third baseman to intercept the ball and relay it to second in an attempt to get the batsman advancing to that base.

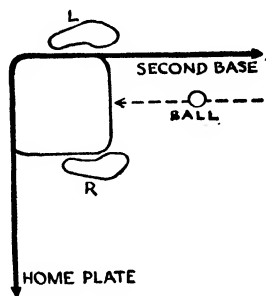


DIAGRAM 139.—The footwork of the third baseman as he straddles the bag, faces the play, and forces the base runner to "tag" himself.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Why have professional ball players facetiously remarked that third basemen should pay to get into the park and play on the team?
2. How do many ground balls hit to the third baseman differ from those hit to the second baseman and shortstop?
3. Why are amateur third basemen required to play more slow hit balls and bunts than professional third basemen?
4. What is the technique of fielding bunts and slow rollers?
5. What throwing form should the third baseman employ on hard-hit ground balls? Slow rollers and bunts?
6. What are the territorial responsibilities of the third baseman?
7. Explain several tactical situations which the third baseman is called upon to diagnose.
8. Diagram the footwork of a third baseman in covering his base and tagging the runner on a throw from right field.

TEST QUESTIONS

- T F 1. Today third basemen are playing closer to the base line and farther back than they formerly did.
- T F 2. If a batted ball hits third base and then rolls into foul territory it is a foul ball.
- T F 3. The third baseman should protect his base when opposing base runners are in scoring position.
- T F 4. A right-handed hitter is most likely to hit a fast ball which is pitched on the outside of the plate toward third base territory.
- T F 5. Sacrifice bunts and "squeeze" plays are more common in amateur ranks than in professional ball.
- T F 6. With a runner on first in the late innings, no outs, and the score tied, a third baseman might reasonably expect a sacrifice bunt.
- T F 7. The third baseman will average more chances per game than the second baseman.
- T F 8. The third baseman should aim to throw a double play ball to the second baseman about letter or shoulder height.
- T F 9. The third baseman should cover the bag and tag runners in the same way that the second baseman employs.
- T F 10. Managers differ as to the duties of a third baseman on "cut-off" plays.

OUTFIELD PLAY

The boy who hopes to become a successful outfielder should possess certain qualifications and master the special fundamentals demanded in that important position. First of all, he should be a dependable hitter. In the second place, he must have the speed to cover a large territory in the outfield and to be a constant threat on the base paths. In addition, he should have a strong throwing arm, and finally, it is obvious that he must be able to field grounders and catch fly balls. These requisites may be found in most any type of build although managers and coaches seem to prefer a large man with plenty of power and natural ability.

The Outfield Positions.—The qualifications and duties of the three outfielders, right, center, and left, vary somewhat, due to the layout of the diamond, the presence or absence of fences, their direction from the hitter, and other factors.

In right and center fields batted balls will curve or "slice" toward the side lines, while in center field the ball is more likely to follow a straight line in its flight. Since there are fewer left than right handed hitters, particularly in amateur baseball, the right fielder will get fewer chances than either of his other outfield teammates. But he should have a strong throwing arm because of the fact that he is frequently called upon to make the long throw to third base. He must back-up first base and the second baseman, and he may have to catch fly balls near a fence, or field balls which carom off the boards.

The left fielder's throw to third base is shorter but he gets more chances than his right field teammate, so he should be a sure catch of fly balls.

The center fielder should be the best and fastest outfielder of the three. He receives more chances than either of his teammates and he has more plays to "back-up" through the center of the infield and behind the other outfielders. He is usually given the "right-of-way" on fly balls to either side which may be fielded by him or his teammate.

Fielding Fly Balls.—In fielding fly balls it is imperative that he get to the spot where the ball will fall, at the earliest possible moment. This demands proper stance and starting technique.

The Stance and the Start.—The outfielder should assume a slightly crouched position with the legs well spread and the weight well distributed on the balls of the feet. From this stance he can start quickly in any direction. If the ball is hit in his territory, he should pivot on the foot in the direction of the break, that is, if the ball is hit to his left, he should pivot on his left foot and make his first step with his right. This same rule does not apply if the ball is hit back over his head. In this case, he pivots on the far foot and steps back first with the foot nearest the direction of the ball. He runs much like a sprinter in that he starts with short strides which gradually increase in length as he attains maximum speed. He should *run on his toes* as



FIG. 53.—The outfielder catching a fly ball. Starting forward (left); starting to the right and back (left center); and catching the ball, palms up (right).

this lessens the *jar* and, therefore, interferes less with the eyes in following the flight of the ball. The arms, too, should swing in sprint form in the half-bent position at the side and not be extended toward the ball until the very last moment. (Figure 53).

Catching Fly Balls.—When he feels he can make the catch the outfielder should call "I have it." His teammate should answer back "Take it." On the other hand, if his teammate calls for it, he should tell him to "Take it." They may help each other by calling "Plenty of room" or "Take your time." If possible, he should get to the spot where the ball will fall as speedily as possible, so that he can get set in front of it, ready for the return throw to the infield. This will also prepare him for any unforeseen circumstances due to the wind, the sun, the way the ball is hit, or other factors.

The position of the hands in receiving the ball will depend upon

the elevation and direction at which the ball is caught. When possible, the ball should be caught in front of the face with the arms extended and relaxed, the palms turned up with little fingers together, forming a cup. The hands should "give" with the catch and the player should watch the ball right into the glove. Some outfielders, however, find it difficult to hold the ball in this manner and prefer to catch the ball with thumbs together and fingers pointing upward. If the ball is to be caught below the waist, the hand should be cupped with palms out, little fingers together and pointing downward.

On long fly balls hit far back over the head of the outfielder an experienced player will judge the ball in a split-second, turn his back to it, and run full speed where he thinks it will fall. He should never run backward or "back track" for a ball. A large part of the outfielder's practice should be spent in going back after fly balls. If he can master this skill, he can play in closer to the infield and catch many balls that might otherwise fall for base-hits. The great Tris Speaker could probably play closer to the infield than any outfielder who ever lived. He caught many fly balls that would have fallen safely in front of an ordinary outfielder, yet he could go back with the speed and grace of an antelope and pull down many a potential double and triple. (Figure 53).

On short fly balls the outfielder may find it necessary to leave his feet and dive for the ball at the last moment. He should fall flat with arms and legs fully extended or double up and roll as he falls.

Fielding Ground Balls.—The outfielder may play a ground ball in one of two ways. On hurried plays he handles it in much the same way as the infielders, but if the situation demands that he "play it safe" he should drop one knee to the ground. The right handed player, in this event, should place his right knee beside his left heel. The forearms should be held close together with the elbows near the body. In this manner he at least can "block" the ball.

The Outfielder's Throw.—Outfielders should get set for the throw with the foot opposite the throwing arm slightly advanced. The proper way to throw is by the overhand method. The ball should be held and released by the first and second fingers slightly spread on top, and the thumb underneath, which is the same grip which the pitcher employs for his fast ball. This grip causes the ball to carry farther and straighter. Outfielders should not curve the ball. Hurried throws should be avoided although *the ball should be returned to the infield immediately*. Return throws, except relays and very short ones, should be "hopped" or bounced to the infielder or catcher. This throw is

easier to handle, it permits "cut-off" plays, described elsewhere, and it is faster. If the playing field is in poor condition, it may be safer to throw the ball on the fly.

Outfield Defensive Strategy.—In addition to the mechanics of fielding and throwing the outfielder must learn the proper defensive strategy. Before each ball is pitched he should think through the play in advance, if it should be hit to him. Among other things, he should have in mind the type of hitter, the inning, the score, the number of outs, the number of runners on the bases, the balls and strikes on the batter, the pitch to be made, the wind, and the sun.

Playing Hitters.—All fielders should play deep on power hitters and close on "choke" hitters. The left fielder should move back for right handed batters and nearer the infield and the center fielder on left handed hitters. On the other hand, the right fielder plays back for left handed batters and up and over for right handers. Obviously, there are exceptions to this rule. Weak hitters may hit late. Some right-handed batters are known as right field hitters and vice versa. Moreover, batters usually hit late on fast ball pitchers and "pull" curve balls. Big League outfielders also shift their position with the type of pitch. Outside pitches are usually hit late while inside pitches are often "pulled." Furthermore, since they know very well the strength and weaknesses of opposing batsmen they can play their position more intelligently. If the pitcher is behind the batter with two balls and no strikes (2 and 0) or three balls and one strike (3 and 1) the outfielders shift even farther toward the hitter's strength.

With a lead in the score the outfielders should play deep to prevent extra base hits. On the other hand, with the winning run on third base in the late innings they should play closer to the infield.

Weather Conditions.—Outfielders, more than any other ball players, must take into account the direction and strength of the wind, and the location of the sun. Cross winds may blow the ball over to a fellow outfielder. A wind at his back will shorten the carry of the fly ball, while a strong wind in his face will give the ball such a carry that it may go over his head for extra bases. Outfielders should take all of this into account before calling for the ball.

All outfielders should be equipped with sun glasses because at least one of them is called upon to play a sun field in almost every ball park in the country. The fielding of the player will be adversely affected if he is compelled to look into the sun to catch fly balls. Since it is difficult to care for glasses fastened to the bill of the cap the type which fits around the head with a rubber band is recommended.

Return Throws.—The ball should ordinarily be played safely and returned to the infield immediately. The outfielder must decide ahead of the play where he is to throw the ball, and his teammate should call the play for him after a hard run for the ball.

With the bases full, it is inadvisable to attempt to throw home after catching a fly ball deep in the outfield. The throw should be to third if the runner on second is waiting to dash to that base. Short fly balls should be thrown home with a man on third. This will either hold the runner on third, catch him going home, or permit a "cut-off" play.

With second occupied on a hit that is difficult to field, or, on slow rollers the outfielder should throw to second base. With first base occupied the throw should be to third. A base hit on the hit and run play, which is directly at the outfielder, may be played to third, but otherwise it should be thrown to second base. The idea in the mind of the outfielder should be to prevent the winning or tying run from getting into scoring position.

Relays.—The outfielder usually does not act as a relay man. This function is performed by the shortstop or second baseman. On long extra-base hits one outfielder retrieves the ball while the other one gets in line with the play half way between his outfield teammate and the relay man. He then calls the play and the ball is thrown past him to the infielder.

Tactical Situations.—Outfielders should constantly keep in mind the tactical situation.

1. In the last half of the eighth inning with the score 6 to 5 in favor of the visiting team, no outs, and no one on base, the center fielder dashes in and attempts a diving catch. He fails to hold the ball and the hitter gets two bases. Later he scores the tying run and the home team finally wins in the tenth inning, 7 to 6.

The proper play was to take no chance, but he should have fielded the ball after it struck the ground, holding the batter to a single.

2. In the last half of the ninth inning, with the score tied, a fast runner on second base, and two outs, the hitter singles on the ground to left field. The left fielder plays the ball "safe" and his throw to the plate is late.

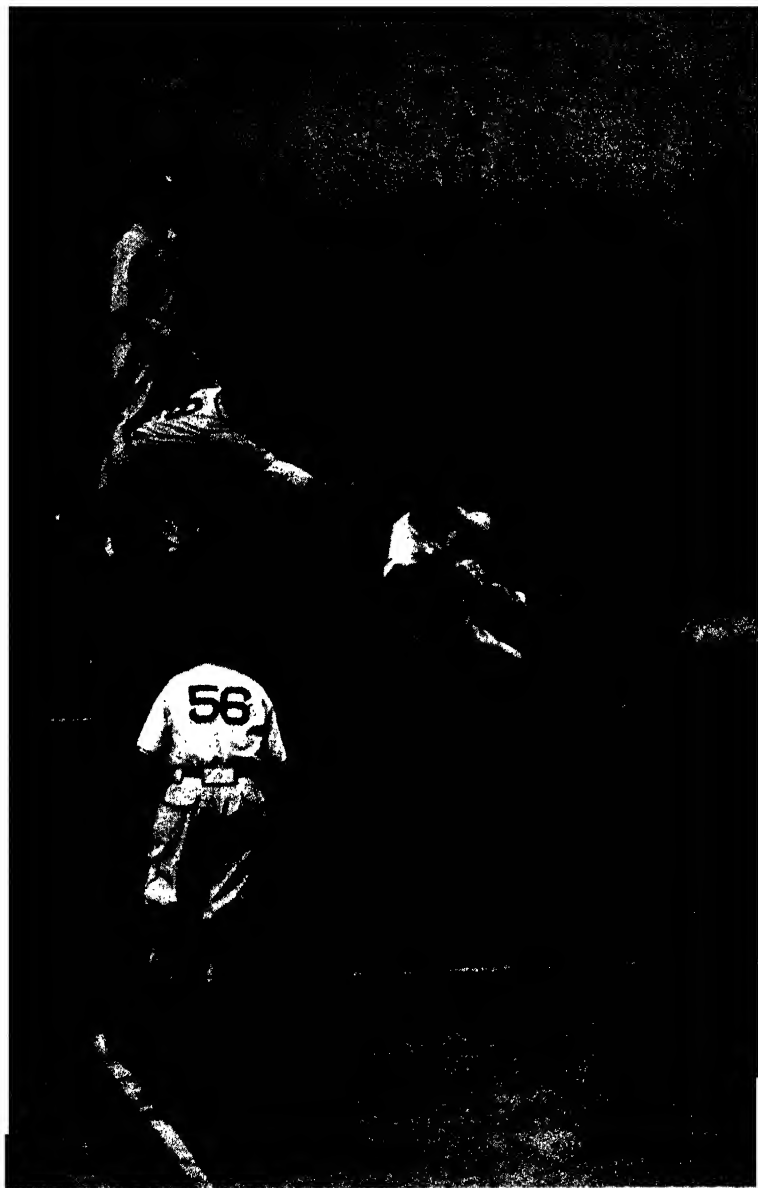
He should have dashed in, played the ball hurriedly and taken a chance on fielding it cleanly. He consumed too much time and the winning run scored.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. What are the chief qualifications needed to become a successful outfielder?
2. How should the three outfielders be assigned, taking into account the requirements of each position?
3. Explain the footwork of an outfielder as he starts for a ball to his right. For a ball to his left-rear.
4. Give at least two good reasons why outfielders should run on their toes.
5. Give arguments favoring the different methods of catching fly balls.
6. Explain the method outfielders employ in playing "safe" on ground balls.
7. Explain the tactics outfielders should use in playing correctly for the various hitters.
8. In what tactical situations should the outfielder attempt to throw home after fielding fly balls or base-hits? When should he throw to second base? To third base?
9. Explain the technique of throwing the ball from the outfield to the infield.
10. Explain the method of relaying the ball from the outfield.

TEST QUESTIONS

- | | | |
|---|---|--|
| T | F | 1. Outfielders need very little practice in fielding ground balls. |
| T | F | 2. Outfielders should act as relay men in returning extra-base hits to the infield. |
| T | F | 3. Outfielders should use the overhand throw in returning the ball to the infield. |
| T | F | 4. It is important that outfielders be dependable hitters. |
| T | F | 5. The center fielder should be the best and fastest outfielder of the three. |
| T | F | 6. To go toward a ball hit to his left the outfielder should pivot on his left foot and make his first step with the right foot. |
| T | F | 7. Outfielders should not leave their feet and dive for ball since they will be in no position to throw after the catch. |
| T | F | 8. Outfielders should "play safe" on ground balls by dropping one knee to the ground. |
| T | F | 9. Outfielders should play deep on "choke" hitters. |
| T | F | 10. With the bases full, it is not advisable to throw home, after catching a fly ball deep in outfield territory. |



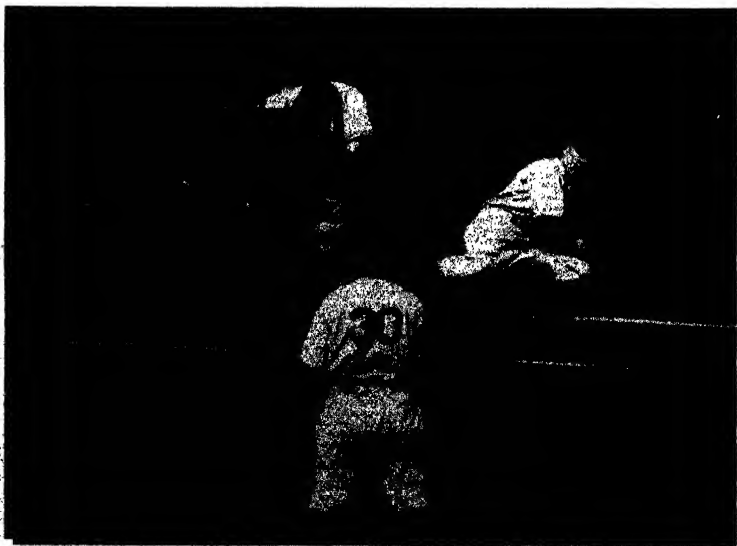
Keystone (FPG)

The baserunner (Caverretta) indicates how to leave the feet in a "hook" slide.



Keystone (FPG)

Note the position of the catcher with one knee on the ground to stop a low throw. Note, also, how the baserunner (Manager Terry, New York Giants) slides in on his right thigh preparatory to sliding his left foot across the plate.



Keystone (FPG)

The baserunner (Rolfe, New York Yankees) shows how to slide back to first when the pitcher attempts to catch the runner off the base.

CHAPTER 8

BATTING AND BUNTING

Next to pitching skill the most important single fundamental in baseball is the ability to hit. Boys who hope to be good ball players must learn to bat well. Modern baseball is dominated by powerful hitting as exemplified by the New York Yankees. Until recent years the importance of hitting was greatly underestimated. Young players who could throw and field, seldom hit because there was so little opportunity to practice hitting. In past years even the organized amateur teams were unable to get sufficient opportunity to stand at the plate under game conditions and swing at pitched balls. An ordinary afternoon's practice offered only three or four times to hit. It was not surprising, therefore, that boys failed to master this important fundamental.

Managers of professional teams and school and college coaches now realize the need for batting skill and arrange their practices so that there is four or five times as much batting as fielding. With hitting receiving a major emphasis the proper choice of a bat becomes one of the player's first duties.

Choosing a Bat.—Although the most important piece of equipment in baseball is the bat, there are many coaches who teach batting without giving much thought to this particular item. An interesting study has been made in regard to the length and weight of bats used in the two major leagues. A survey of 217 models of 217 different major league players disclosed that 6% were 33 inches in length, 26% were 34-inch, 56% were 35-inch bats, and 12% were 36-inch bats.

Most of the leading sluggers in baseball use bats that are 35 inches in length or shorter. Among these players are the following: Joe Cronin, Jimmie Foxx, Lou Gehrig, Billie Herman, Rogers Hornsby, Chuck Klein, Joe Medwick, Joe Moore, Bill Terry, Arky Vaughn, and Paul Waner. Mickey Cochrane, manager of the Detroit Tigers, uses a 34½-inch bat, and Mel Ott, champion home run hitter of the National League, swings a 34-inch bat.

The Balanced Bat.—There is an excellent reason why school and college players should adopt bats of 35 inches and less. Those who insist on long, light bats overlook the important factor of balance.

They think they can swing a long, light bat faster than a short, relatively heavy bat, and thereby get more distance into their drives. Just the opposite condition is true, however. Distance is sacrificed by use of the longer bats because they cannot be swung through as fast as a shorter bat. Players often overlook the fact that a shorter and correctly balanced bat can be swung faster and with more wrist snap, than an incorrectly balanced and longer bat. As in golf, it is the speed of the club head that gives distance, and the speed of the club head or end of the bat depends upon the speed of the wrist snap. The latter, in turn, depends upon the strength of the wrists in relation to the length and weight of the bat. Strong flexible wrists can handle a heavier and longer bat than weak inflexible ones. It should be emphasized, however, that correct balance in a bat has nothing to do with its overall weight. Swinging or leverage weight is the controlling factor. For example, a 36-inch bat weighing only 34 ounces, may have a heavier swinging weight than a 34-inch bat weighing 36 ounces. This fact should be impressed upon every young ball player.

Most bats used by major league players are designed to have the best balance at a certain length. A bat that originally was designed for a 34-inch length cannot be expected to have the same nice balance when it is made 36 inches long. Remodeling a bat that originally was intended to be 34 or 35 inches long into one that is 36 inches destroys its balance and decreases the speed of a player's swing and his accuracy. Major league players insist on bats of driving power and balance. They have found by experience that these two factors can be had only if the bats are of solid timber and, therefore, better than average weight. They know that long, light bats are lacking in driving power, and correct balance, or swinging weight and hence prevent a fast swing with accuracy. Their choice runs to shorter lengths and more compact and solid timber, which means reasonable weights.

Amateur players would do well to copy the professionals in selecting the style of bat. They will also need someone of experience to help them choose the proper grade of wood, since the bats left for the amateurs, after the professional clubs are all supplied, are usually of inferior grade.

Batting Practice.—Batting requires a great deal of natural ability, boundless patience, and endless practice. Pitchers who have excellent control should be used in batting practice. Ordinarily, no effort should be made to baffle the batter. At first, he must be allowed to hit so confidence can be developed. One of the surest ways to spoil potential hitters and make them "gun shy" is to require them to face

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a "wild" pitcher in batting practice. Also the attempt to "fool" the inexperienced player often leads to bad habits and discouragement.

Batting practice should be made as game-like as possible. One way to do this is to provide a catcher. He helps the pitcher's control, speeds up practice, and in that way makes it more enjoyable. Balls and strikes should be called. This tends to improve the batter's judgment and it creates a game atmosphere.

The hitter should not bat too long at a time. He should hit three to five balls and then go back to his position and think over his faults. Hitting too long often causes a batter to grow careless. He should look for good balls, that is to say, he should swing only at strikes, and let all balls which are not in the strike zone go by. If he gets into the faulty habit of striking at bad balls, he will be an easy prey for the clever pitcher and he will never become a great hitter. He should watch the ball and force the pitcher to throw it over the plate. He should not hit for the fence but should swing naturally and "straight away" or "out-in-front" and attempt to hit the ball through or over the infield.

Guess-hitting.—The batter should not guess what the pitcher intends to throw but should watch the ball and be governed by the twist and spin. A player may be hit and badly hurt by a pitched ball, if he falls into the habit of "guess-hitting." If the player is a guess-hitter, he should attempt to anticipate only a fast ball. The curve comes much more slowly than the fast ball, and the probability of being able to get out of the way of it, if the guess is wrong, is much greater. It is obvious, for example, that if the hitter guessed the pitch was going to be a curve and it happened to be a fast ball, he might be seriously injured before he could duck out of the way.

Position at the Plate.—The young player who wishes to become a dependable hitter must first learn the proper position or stance at the plate. A novice can be detected immediately by the improper position of his arms or feet, and a smart pitcher will take advantage of any fault. It should be stated in the beginning, however, that there are many variations in hitting form even among such famous past and present Big League "stars" as Cobb, Ruth, Gehrig, Hornsby, DiMaggio, and others. Some stand close, others away from the plate, some stand forward, others to the rear of the batter's box. Some remain practically flat-footed during the swing, while others take a step or stride of varying length. Moreover, they frequently vary their position according to the pitcher, moving forward for a curve ball specialist, and standing well back for the fast-ball artist. Gehrig, for example, stands

with his rear foot on the inside of the batter's box near the plate. (Diagram 140). He does this "to protect the outside of the plate." In other words, he must stand so he can hit pitches on the outside corner. Naturally, the pitchers will serve him many balls of this type since he is a powerful "pull" hitter who frequently finds the range over the inviting right field fences on pitches over the inside corner of the plate. Hornsby stood far back with his rear foot in the outside rear corner of the batter's box (Diagram 140), then stepped forward and toward the plate on outside pitches. Both Gehrig and DiMaggio (Diagram 140) stand with feet well apart, the latter striding only a few inches with his left or forward foot.

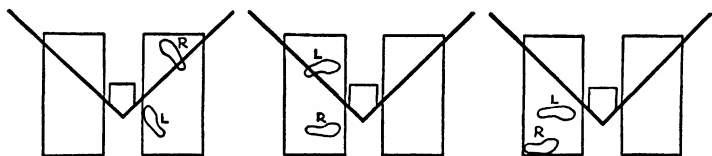
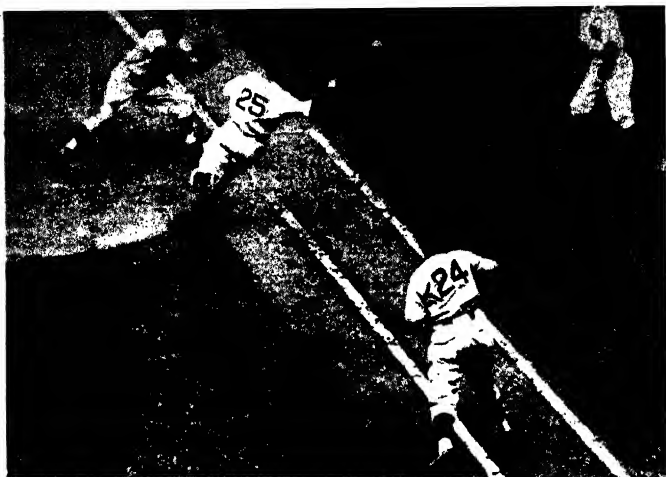


DIAGRAM 140.—Three positions of the batter at the plate. The Gehrig stride stance with the rear foot on the inside of the batter's box near the plate (left). The Hornsby stance with the rear foot in the outside rear corner of the batter's box (right). The DiMaggio wide stride stance (center).

Stride and Timing.—Exact timing in striding or stepping into the ball, is imperative if the hitter hopes to get his weight and power into the drive.

One of the greatest faults in hitting is overstriding. Some young players feel that they must take a long stride if they are to get power into the swing. This, however, is not true. Among other things, the long stride lowers the shoulders, arms, and especially the eyes in such a way that it interferes with the plane of vision. A six inch stride, or less, is probably ample. Joe DiMaggio, the great young hitting star of the New York Yankees, stands with feet apart and moves the left only a few inches, yet he gets tremendous distance in his drives. "Flat-footed" hitters are very effective in meeting and placing the ball. Joe Sewell was a "flat-footed" hitter who struck out less than a half dozen times a year. Young players should be natural and not try to imitate Babe Ruth, since there was only one Babe Ruth. Few can follow his style. His great eye, quick reaction time, and co-ordination made him outstanding among hitters in baseball.

In addition to other disadvantages, overstriding leaves the batter off balance after contact with the ball, and the first step toward first is



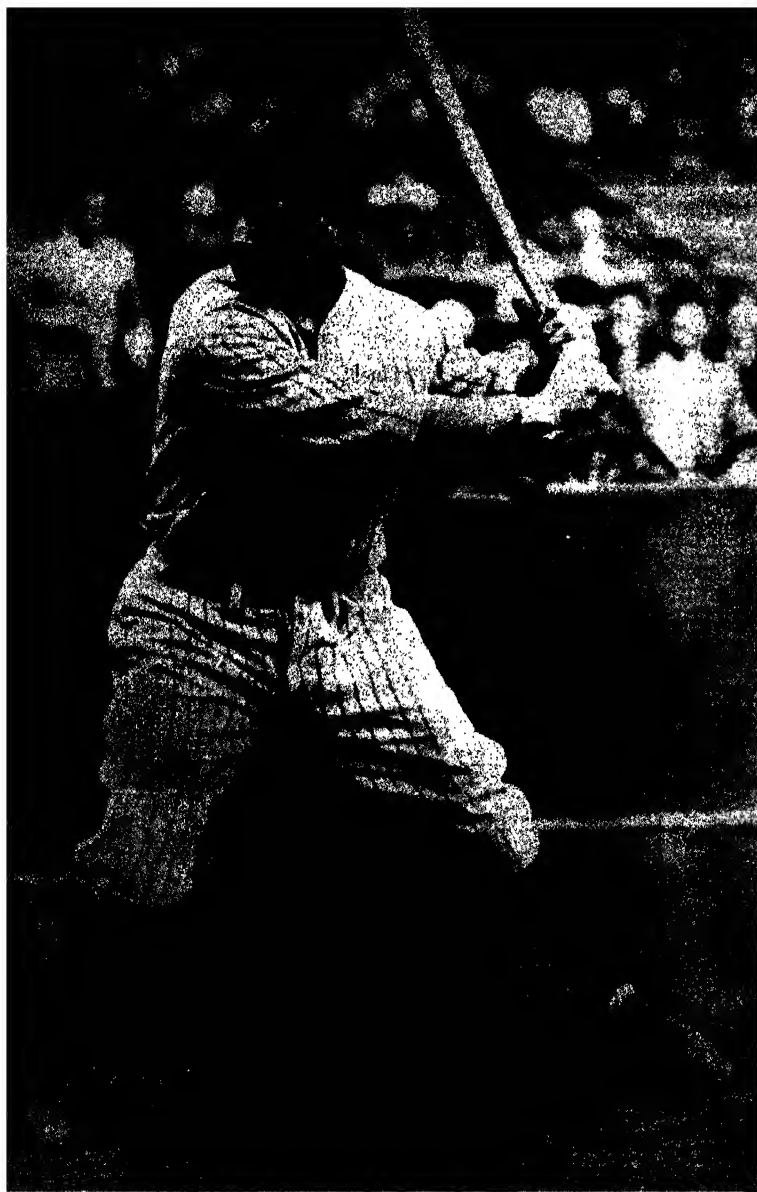
Keystone (FPG)

The pitcher and first baseman show how to throw and receive the ball *inside the baseline* to avoid hitting the runner with the ball.



Keystone (FPG)

The shortstop (Durocher) shows how to back-up the second baseman (Frisch) on a throw from the catcher when the baserunner (Goslin) attempts to steal second



Underwood & Underwood (FPG)

A powerful batting position (Gehrig, New York Yankees) just before meeting

slow and awkward. The batter should move into the pitch. For instance, if the ball comes up on the outside of the plate, the batter should step forward and toward the outside as he strikes at it.

The batter should always be ready to swing. He cannot hit with the bat on his shoulder. He should avoid all preliminary motions and relax as he waits for the pitch. He should start the swing early and *meet the ball well out in front of his body*. If the ball is met even

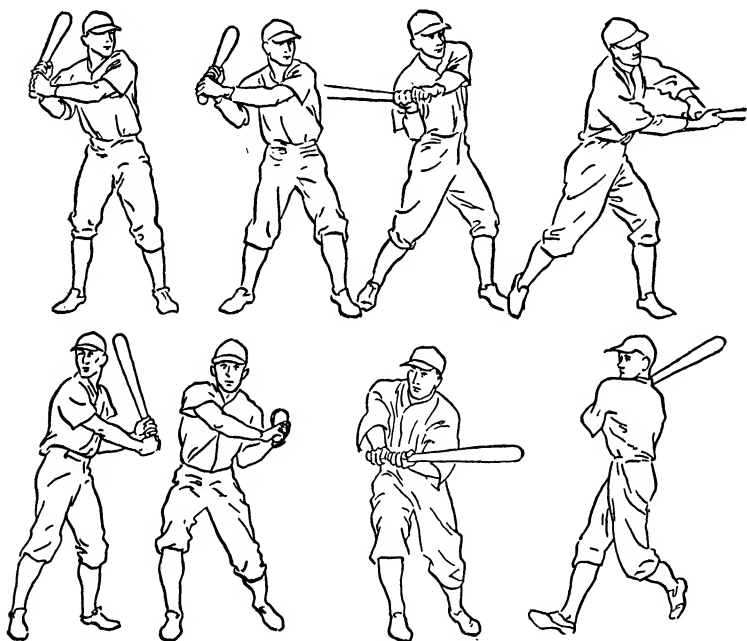


FIG. 54.—Batting form. Note the stride position of the feet, the step, the raised arms and elbows, the wrist-cock, the horizontal swing, and the follow-through.

with or behind the center of the body, the result will probably be a feeble fly or ground ball. If, on the other hand, the batter meets the ball out in front; he will get the advantage of the full wrist snap and the follow-through. He also has the ball within his line of vision and has more chance of contact with it. (Figure 54).

Hitting Off the Heels.—While overstriding is one of the greatest faults in hitting it is probably no worse than the very bad habit of *hitting off the heels*. This weakness is very common among beginners,

especially those who are a little afraid of getting hit by a pitched ball. *Hitting off the heels* means that the batter attempts to reach out to hit the ball, at the same time drawing his hips back away from the plate as he shifts his weight back on his heels. Such hitters get into the habit of drawing back away from the plate as the ball approaches, because of their uncertainty about its ultimate course. For self-protection they first draw away, or lean back on the heels, then reach out and make a feeble stroke at the ball. All power is lost and few batters of this type ever drive the ball out of the infield.

The Grip of the Bat.—Three distinct grips are employed in baseball. In the first, the hands are placed together at the end of the handle. This grip is used by a free swinger and a long distance hitter, such as Babe Ruth. In the second grip, the hands are placed upward from the end of the bat. This is known as the "choke" grip, and is used by small men and place hitters. Another grip used very little, but which proved effective for the great Ty Cobb, is with the hands about six or seven inches apart. This type of grip has been used effectively for place, or long distance hitting but is not recommended for the average beginner.

The bat should be held securely, but not too firmly with the lower hand on top as the player holds it in front and with the upper hand behind the handle. If the grip is too tight, tenseness will result; if too loose, power will be lost. The batter should assume a natural, relaxed position with his elbows lifted and in front. He should meet the ball "out in front" of the plate and continue the swing with a free, co-ordinated follow-through. Every player should develop his wrists since a fast wrist snap gives power to the swing.

The Swing of the Bat.—There are many variations of the swing used in baseball but the most common are the rigid arm, the push swing, and the wrist swing. The wrist swing is the most natural and, therefore, the most effective. The batter should shift the weight from the back leg to the forward leg when swinging, tensing the back leg for power. (Figure 54).

The swing of the bat should describe a flat arc parallel with the ground and on the same plane as the pitch. To perform this skill smoothly the elbows must be kept away from and well out in front of the body. Along with overstriding, and hitting off the heels, the tendency of beginners to hold one or both elbows tight against the sides as they swing the bat is another very common fault. The bat should be held even with the shoulder and always poised in the wrists ready for the pitch. The swing should be smooth, even and not too hard.

Proper timing is the factor that counts most. Great hitters watch the ball until the last possible moment to see which way it will break, then bring the bat around with a lightning-like wrist snap.

Watching the Ball.—Batting requires excellent co-ordination between the eye, hand, arm, and body movements. Another one of the major faults of batters is the failure to follow the ball with the eye all the way to the bat. A skillful hitter watches the ball leave the pitcher's hand and he follows it with his eyes until there is actual contact with the bat. Moving pictures of the eyes of Big Leaguers in hitting practice show very clearly how they watch the ball right on to the bat. They meet the ball squarely and "out in front" without overswinging. Moreover, they choose good balls and do not swing at high, low, or wide pitches. Even good balls are hard to hit. By keeping the eye on the ball young players can learn to overcome the tendency to hit at bad balls. They will soon realize that it is difficult enough to hit the good ones safely.

Place Hitting.—Willie Keeler, the greatest place hitter in baseball, said: "Hit them where they ain't." Some professional baseball hitters are often able to place a ball where they want it, provided the ball is pitched properly. The young player should practice hitting inside and outside balls through infield openings, and if this can be done with accuracy he may try it in a game. To place a ball, the batter should step in the direction of the pitch and meet it, using more of a shove stroke than a swing. He should not guess the pitch, but should watch the ball closely.

Batting Hints.—In résumé, it should be helpful for the young ball player who wishes to improve his batting to check his habits with the following suggestions:

1. Develop confidence.
2. Maintain balance and coordination.
3. Avoid overstriding.
4. Do not lunge at the ball.
5. Shift or slide the front foot in the hitting stride instead of lifting it.
6. Keep the arms and elbows lifted out away from the body.
7. Step into the ball. Keep the foot out of the "bucket."
8. Meet the ball "out in front" of the plate.
9. Keep the bat back of the shoulder and the wrists cocked and ready to hit.
10. Do not "hit off the heels."
11. Use a firm grip which is neither too loose nor too tense.
12. Swing only at good balls.
13. Select a well balanced bat of medium weight and length.

14. Do not swing too hard.
15. Watch the ball until it strikes the bat.
16. Swing the bat parallel to the ground.
17. Do not let the end of the bat drop.

Bunting.—The importance of bunting should be impressed upon amateur players when they first begin playing. It is an especially effective offensive weapon in college and high school baseball. It is easier to develop a fair bunting team than it is to build up a defense against it, since one man does the bunting while it takes the whole team to defend against it. And most high school and college teams are not skilled enough in fundamentals to handle the ball on his play without making many costly errors. On the other hand, a fair degree of bunting skill is comparatively easy to learn and can be practiced indoors during the winter months before the weather permits outdoor practice.

There are three distinct types of bunts: the sacrifice, the push, and the drag. On the sacrifice, the batter must be sure to place the ball down properly on the ground "sacrificing" himself, or deliberately making an out thereby advancing another base runner. The quick bunt for a safe hit should be attempted when the infield is out of position. This increases the chances of placing the ball in a spot where it will be difficult to field. The drag and push bunts are used for base hits. If the batter is right handed, a push bunt is used and if left handed, the drag bunt is used. These bunts might be placed through any opening in the infield but are usually placed just out of reach of the pitcher and between the first and second basemen.

Technique of Bunting.—On a sacrifice bunt, the batter should shift his feet, stand crouched, and face the pitcher just as the ball is about to be released. (See Figure 55.) He should lean slightly forward with the weight on the balls of his feet. His feet should be nearly even with each other and in a natural stride position. He should hold the bat out in front of his body and the plate, with elbows slightly flexed and the bat parallel with the ground. The bat should be held rather lightly. One hand should grasp the handle loosely near the end, while the other holds the center of the bat near the trademark with the fingers behind for protection. The bat must neither be swung at, nor pulled away from, the ball. The force of the pitch is dissipated, and the speed of the ball deadened by permitting it to hit the bat as it is held loosely in the hands. If the bat were gripped tightly, the rebound of the ball would be similar to the rebound, if it were thrown against a brick wall. With the bat held loosely the rebound will be

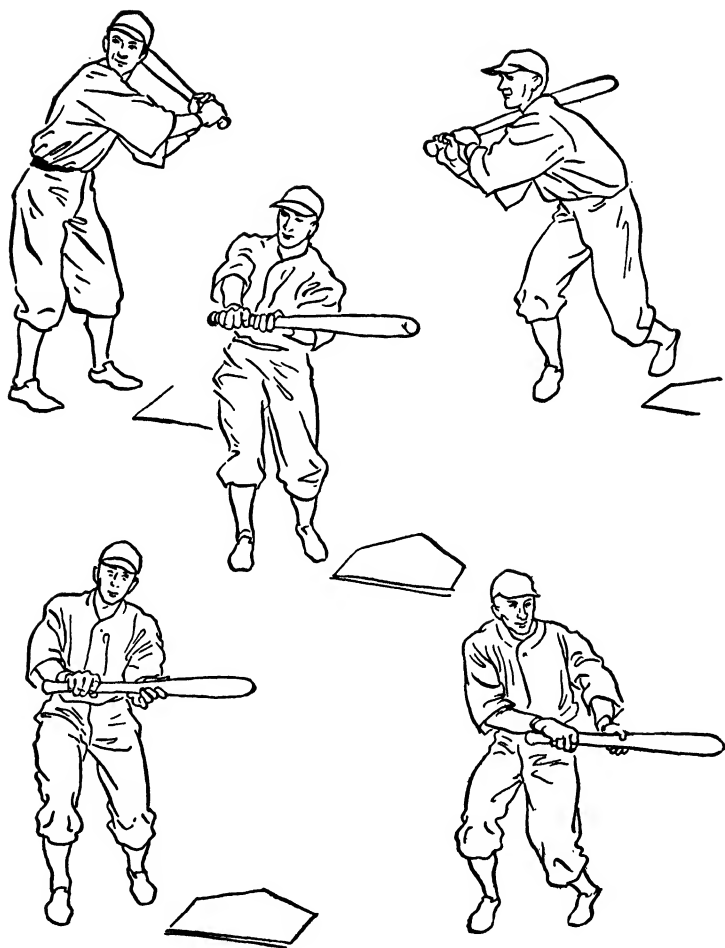


FIG. 55.—Bunting technique (lower left) and drag bunt form (lower right). In the lower left illustration note the position of the feet and hands, the bent elbows, and the slight crouch. The position at the plate (upper left), the swing (center), and the follow-through (upper right).

as "dead" as if the ball were thrown against a hanging canvas. It is important to keep the elbows slightly flexed to assist in getting the "dead" ball. Pulling the bat back as the ball strikes should be faithfully avoided, as it is a very bad habit.

The bunter should pivot on the balls of his feet and shift into position the instant the pitcher starts his delivery. The bat should be held out in front of the eyes on a plane with the bunter's vision. This method of keeping the bat high will help the player get the ball down to the ground, while the common practice of holding the bat low and bringing it up to bunt causes the bunter to hit the ball and cause a pop-fly into the air. The batter should move the body up and down with the bat so the eyes may be kept on a level with the line of vision.

Sacrifice bunts are placed down either the first or third base line. With a man on first and second and with no one out, the third baseman should be made to field the ball, as this play pulls him away from third base. Push and drag bunts are to be used by clever bunters only. The ball should be pushed past the pitcher and first baseman, or pitcher and third baseman. The batter may try to draw infielders out of position and then place the ball through the infield. (Figure 55).

Hints to Bunters.—Any average ball player can learn to bunt if he practices the proper form.

1. Hold the bat loosely.
2. Do not swing at the ball.
3. Do not step back.
4. Face the pitcher.
5. Bunt only at good balls.
6. Do not pull the bat away from the ball.
7. Get the ball onto the ground before starting to first.
8. Keep the hands spread.
9. Keep the bat parallel with the ground.
10. Hold the bat out in front and on a level with the eyes.
11. Crouch slightly.

The Batting Order.—The batting order of every ball team should be arranged for maximum effectiveness and scoring power. The following points should be helpful in arranging the hitters:

The Lead-Off Man.—The basic need for an offensive is a lead-off man who can get on base. He must be an excellent judge of balls and strikes and should receive many walks. He must not be the type that strikes at bad balls. It is difficult to pitch to a small man and most lead-off men are small. In addition, he should be a fast and good base runner for he will take part in many running plays. Finally, he

must be a very good hitter, and should lead the team in runs scored. The lead-off man, then, should be a good judge of balls and strikes, a dependable hitter with the ability to draw bases on balls, and he must be fast.

The Second Batter.—In modern baseball, the second batter is a very important cog on offense. Formerly, a weak hitter but good bunter, whose duty it was to sacrifice the lead-off man to second, was used in this position. Today, in addition to bunting, he is often called upon to hit on the ground to right field behind the runner on first. Moreover, if no one is on base, he should be able to hit for extra bases. This places him in scoring position for the following three batters who should be the team's best hitters. With a runner on first he should be able to execute the "hit-and-run," and above all else, he should be able to advance the runner by hitting towards right-field. A left-handed hitter, therefore, who is a "pull" hitter is usually placed in the second "slot." Red Rolfe of the New York Yankees is a fine second place hitter. A man who can hit behind the runners will hit into few double plays. Some right-handed professional players can hit to right field behind the runner and make, therefore, excellent second hitters, as for example, Lindstrom, formerly of the New York Giants. But few right-handed amateur batters can hit to right field consistently.

The Third Batter.—The third batter should be the most consistent hitter on the team. His batting average should be higher than that of the two preceding batters. He should be a man who can get many hits, for he will have many opportunities to drive runners over the plate, or place them in scoring position. It is also important that he be able to get on base frequently, for the two following men will be the most powerful hitters on the team. For this reason, he should be fast and an excellent base runner.

Bill Terry of the New York Giants was a fine example of a third batter. So was Frisch of the St. Louis Cardinals. Gehringer and DiMaggio are other examples. Babe Ruth would have been an ideal fourth batter but he was "walked" so often with men on bases, that the Yankees placed him third and another great batter, Lou Gehrig, was placed fourth.

The Fourth and Fifth Batters.—The fourth and fifth batters should be the best and longest hitters on the team. With the batting order correctly arranged, they will bat more often with runners on the bases, than the other hitters. They should be powerful as well as timely hitters, who lead in "runs batted in." Men like Foxx, Gehrig, Greenberg

and Medwick are ideal fourth and fifth hitters. They are usually near the top of the league standing in extra base hits and "runs batted in."

During a season's play the men in the first five positions will face the opposing pitchers more often than the men at the bottom of the batting order and they should represent, therefore, the team's offensive strength.

Completing the Batting Order.—The remaining four players should be placed in the order according to their ability. Usually the catcher will bat eighth and the pitcher ninth. They do the bulk of the defensive work and are therefore more likely to be fatigued. By placing them lower down in the batting list they get a longer rest period. Even these men, however, are often good hitters. If they are dependable hitters in the lower brackets, it is a great aid, since every member of the batting order requires the opponents to extend themselves at all times.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. What type of bat should the beginner choose?
2. How should batting practice be organized?
3. What is meant by guess-hitting?
4. Explain the proper position at the plate. How does it vary among great professional players?
5. Explain the stride that should be recommended to young ball players. How does it vary among professional players of note?
6. What is meant by "hitting off the heels"?
7. How should the bat be gripped and swung?
8. Describe the proper technique for bunting. What are the various types of bunts?
9. Describe the characteristics of the first five hitters in a well arranged batting order.
10. How should left and right-handed batters be arranged in the batting order?

TEST QUESTIONS

- | | | |
|---|---|--|
| T | F | 1. Beginners should be taught to crouch at the plate while batting. |
| T | F | 2. A right handed hitter is most likely to hit an outside ball to right field. |
| T | F | 3. Sacrifice bunts seem more profitable for high schools and colleges than for professional teams. |
| T | F | 4. The hitter should not attempt a sacrifice bunt on a bad ball. |
| T | F | 5. Great power can be put into the swing if the batter will only "hit off his heels." |
| T | F | 6. The ability to hit only at good balls is an extremely important fundamental of batting. |



"Pic" (PPG)

ct form for a right handed batter (DiMag-
New York Yankees). Note, here too, the
the raised elbows, the grip, and the
of the wrists. Observe the form of the
pitcher and the catcher's stance.



"Pic" (PPG)

Another picture of batting form (Gehrig, New
York Yankees) from a different angle. All
the long hitters break the wrists preparatory
to a powerful wrist snap as the bat meets
the ball.



Keystone (FPG)

The batter demonstrates bunting form. Note how the right hand has been moved down the bat. Inexperienced players will have more success by holding the bat farther out in front. The catcher (Mancuso, New York Giants) has an excellent stance for receiving the ball.



Keystone (FPG)

The batter (Ruth, New York Yankees) misses the ball. Observe the complete

- T F 7. Fielding practice is far more important for young ball players than batting practice.
- T F 8. Young batters should be taught to attempt to out-guess the pitcher.
- T F 9. The hitter should complete his stride before the swing is started in order to get his weight into the drive.
- T F 10. Young ball players, as a rule, do not stride far enough when batting.

CHAPTER 9

BASE RUNNING

Baseball is composed of three fundamental skills, i.e., batting, throwing, and running, and no club ever won a championship without a high degree of development of all three of them. The use of running has been neglected somewhat in modern baseball but it probably is still as important as each of the other two. Pioneers in the game stole bases regularly. Their idea was to run and keep running until the opposition finally threw the ball away. Kelly and Hamilton each stole over 100 bases for two successive seasons. The great "Ty" Cobb thrilled the spectators for years with his daring on the base paths. Eddie Collins and Max Carey were constant menaces on the attack.

While the advent of the lively ball has reduced the effectiveness of this offensive weapon it is still a powerful threat to the defense. It is possible that some day the spectators will have had their fill of home runs and the lively ball. If this time ever comes, great plays depending for success on running skill and daring again may captivate the fan.

Characteristics of a Good Base Runner.—Speed of foot obviously is one of the greatest assets in base running, but the fastest man does not always make the best base runner. Blinding speed is not as essential as quick starting and fast thinking. Good base runners know when to take chances and when to "play safe" and they seldom make a bad move which might tend to throw the whole attack out of gear.

The Start and Run from Home Plate.—The batter becomes a base runner the instant he hits a fair ball. Whether a right or left handed hitter he should pivot and push off with his back foot and take his first step toward first base with his front foot. Obviously, the left hander has an advantage since he hits from the first base side of the plate and his swing tends to bring him into his stride. *He should run out all fairly hit balls at full speed.* Failure to do this is a sure sign of a poorly coached team and a lazy ball player. The "fighting" team is the one that usually wins, since many hit balls, which the batter feels certain will be fielded, are often fumbled. If he has grounded to an infielder, he should continue on over first base *in regular stride* in an attempt to beat the play. He should not jump at the bag, but

should learn to touch the base squarely on top with either foot to avoid ankle injury.

Making the Turn.—On fly balls and safe hits the base runner should “*make his turn*” at first base. He should veer to the outside of the base line about 20 feet from first then turn sharply toward second by pivoting preferably with the left foot on the inside of the bag. All bases should be touched in this manner as it assists in the pivot and a wide sweep outside the base line (Figure 56). Avoiding the wide circle after crossing the base saves time and distance and leaves the runner in position to keep the ball in front of him and take advantage of fumbles and bad relay throws. (Diagram 141).

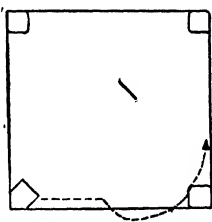


DIAGRAM 141. — The path of the base runner in “making the turn” at first base on fly balls and safe hits.

On First Base.—Once the batter is safely on first base he should immediately become offensive minded. He should stand with his left foot on the right field corner of the base until he has received the signal and the batter is ready to hit. Furthermore, he should find out who has the ball and wait until the pitcher takes his position on the “rubber.” This will avoid “hidden ball” plays, and will eliminate any chance of missing the signal. (Figure 56).

Possibly plays should be foremost in the runner’s mind. He should know the score, the outs, the inning, the count of balls and strikes, the men on bases, and the strength and weaknesses of opponents.

On fly balls hit to the outfield, with less than two out, he should go only as far toward second as will enable him to get safely back to first should the ball be caught. On rare occasions the ball may be hit so far as to enable him to go from first to second after the catch. In this case, he should hold the base until the catch.

Getting a Lead.—Getting a lead is probably the most important of base running. Stolen bases are made on the pitcher, not on catcher. If the pitcher permits the runner to “get the jump” few pitchers will ever be able to throw him out.

The best plan is to get a comfortable distance from the base and *touch the ball*. It is impossible to watch all the fielders, and if he attempted this, the defense would have him jumping around like a black rabbit.” The main objective is to start for the desired base *with the pitch*. To do this successfully the base runner must watch the pitcher’s “move” or motion. “Ty” Cobb was able to steal bases with

consummate ease on one pitcher because of a tell-tale movement in his delivery. He could tell by the contraction of a calf muscle in one of the pitcher's legs whether he was going to pitch to the batter or throw to first base. Hunching of the shoulders, twisting of the head, rising



FIG. 56.—Base running and sliding. The base runner is *making his turn* at first base by pivoting with his left foot on the bag (upper right). At first base he stands with his left foot on the right field corner of the bag (upper left). The fall away or hook slide (below).

on the heels and similar "give-aways" are common in amateur baseball.

The runner should stand in a stride position with the weight evenly distributed and prepared to go in either direction. The distance from the base depends upon the pitcher (right or left handed) and the base runner himself. In the Major Leagues this is figured to a fine point so that each pitcher can tell about how far each player can take on him. Naturally, some can take more than others. The runners, too, know their pitchers and cannot take the liberties with left handers or moundsmen with half-balk motions.

The Start.—In starting for the desired base on an attempted steal the runner should pivot on his right foot and take his first step with the left. Thus he crosses over with his left foot in the direction of his run. *He should not look back for the ball* but should watch the baseman. His actions will usually indicate to the runner just where the ball is to be caught.

Sliding to Bases.—Sliding, like base running, has been greatly neglected in recent years. Most professional players are adept at it, but have little chance to use it because of the emphasis on long hitting. Many amateur players are not so skillful in this fundamental and are in great danger of injury when they slide because of faulty technique. The head-first slide, for example, is not recommended, even though it does give a longer reach and offers less chance of losing the bag, because it is easily blocked and there is great danger of being spiked.

The Fall-Away or Hook Slide.—It is advisable to slide feet first straight at the bag or to either side. If sliding to the right of the base the fall-away or hook slide is executed by assuming a lay-out or sitting position about 10 or 15 feet from the bag with the body inclined backwards, and somewhat to the right, with the head and shoulders up, and with the weight of the body falling on the right Gluteous Maximus (hip) muscle. *The base runner must not jump at the base.* He should go down at an angle, not vertically. The right leg is bent at the knee until the spikes of the right shoe are pointing at the left knee. The left leg is bent also in about the same position as the right. The left foot should hook the base with the instep as the fall-away and slide is made a little to the right of the bag. (Figure 56).

This technique is reversed if sliding to the left. On a straight-in slide the right (or left) leg should be bent at the knee with the calf of the leg under the calf of the left (or right). The left (or right) leg is held somewhat rigid with the toes turned up to avoid catching the spikes in the ground. If the leg underneath is drawn up on contact with the bag, the base runner may immediately rise to a running position. Either leg may be placed underneath depending upon the natural inclinations of the player.

When to Steal.—It is bad baseball to attempt to steal a base when a successful theft will not materially benefit the team. The runner should play safe when his team is far behind.

When to Steal Second Base.—Before attempting to steal second at least three factors must be taken into consideration. In the first place, is it possible to get a good start on the pitcher? Secondly, is the batter likely to hit the runner home if he advances by a steal? And in the

third place, is the score such that this play would be sound? It is not considered good baseball to attempt to steal second with no outs unless unusual conditions alter this rule. With a succession of weak hitters and slow runners following with one run needed to win a game, with a catcher who has a weak throwing arm—these, and other factors, may cause exceptions. Usually the best time to steal second is with two outs in a close game, unless the pitcher is at bat.

When to Steal Third.—The best time to steal third is in a close game with one man out. The reasons for this are apparent since he can score from third base on a long fly, an error, and possibly on a ground ball or a "squeeze" play while it would require a base-hit to score him from second base. Obviously, he should not try to steal third with two outs for a safe hit would still be needed to score him.

When to Steal Home.—The steal of home should rarely be attempted because the chances of success are small. The best time, however, to make the attempt is with two outs and a weak hitter at bat. The break for home should be made just as the pitcher starts his wind-up or just as the catcher starts his return throw to the pitcher.

The Double Steal.—The double steal is usually attempted when runners are occupying first and second or first and third.

With Runners on First and Second.—With runners on first and second, the latter starts the steal and the man on first follows immediately. The success of the play depends upon the ability of the base runners since there must be no "give-away" and the start must be fast. This strategy is ordinarily attempted, with less than two outs, when one run is needed to tie or two runs are needed to win, especially if the pitcher has been highly effective.

With Runners on First and Third.—In this situation the man on first must get a good lead and start with the pitcher's delivery. He should continue on as close as possible to second without being put out. The man on third should not be more than 5 or 6 feet off third, otherwise, he might be deceived or caught by a bluff or snap throw. If the catcher throws to the second baseman or shortstop, the man between first and second should get himself trapped in a "run-down." When the man on third sees the ball in the hands of the second baseman, he should dash for home.

The Delayed Steal.—The delayed steal may be worked with only one man on base or with first and second, first and third, or second and third occupied. One of the runners should get a long lead and rely on the catcher to lob the ball back to the pitcher as many inexperienced catchers do. The runners start advancing a mo-

ment before the catcher releases the ball. This surprise move is likely to disorganize the infield since they are not in position to receive the ball. Many pitchers will either hold the ball or throw it into the outfield in their haste to get the runner.

Hints to Base Runners.—Since more games are probably won and lost on the base paths than in most any other way it behooves the beginning player to master this important fundamental of the game. He should observe the following principles:

1. Do not "cut" the bases. Touch each one in turn.
2. Face the ball at all times and avoid being caught.
3. Watch the ball on long extra-base hits, if it is in front of him.
4. Watch the coach for signals on if the ball is hit behind him.
5. Delay being tagged as long as possible when trapped between bases, if there are other base runners. This will permit them to advance.
6. Stand in foul territory outside the base line when on third base so a fairly batted ball will not hit him and put him out.
7. Advance when fellow base runners ahead advance. Regardless of the advance runner's judgment, and even if he has pulled a "boner," the man behind should advance and get into position to score.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. What are the characteristics of a good base runner?
2. Explain the footwork in the start of the batter after he hits the ball.
3. Diagram and explain the approved method of "making the turn" at first base on all balls hit through the infield.
4. Why should the base runner touch the bag with the *left* foot when "making the turn" at a base?
5. What should the base runner have in mind after he reaches first base?
6. How should the base runner get a lead of the base?
7. Explain the technique of the fall-away or hook slide.
8. Under what conditions should a runner attempt to steal second? Third? Home?
9. Explain the proper method of executing the double steal. The delayed steal.
10. Make a list of hints to base runners which will help to prevent mistakes on the base paths.

TEST QUESTIONS

- T F** 1. The runner on third base should not attempt to score on a ground ball to the infield if there are no outs and the score is tied.
- T F** 2. The batter should slide to first base in an attempt to "beat out" infield ground ball.
- T F** 3. Base runners should take wild chances on the bases if their team is three or four runs behind.

- T F 4. The best time to steal third base is with two men out and the score tied.
- T F 5. The base runner on second base should watch the second baseman and the shortstop to see that they do not slip behind him.
- T F 6. The base runner should always stay outside the diamond when taking a lead off third base.
- T F 7. On the "hit and run" play the base runner should slide into second base if he does not hear the crack of the bat.
- T F 8. The batsman should run out at full speed all balls hit into fair territory.
- T F 9. In "making the turn" at first base the base runner should touch the bag with the right or outside foot.
- T F 10. In stealing second base the runner should watch the baseman rather than the catcher.

SIGNALS AND TEAM PLAY

The success of any organization composed of two or more individuals is largely dependent on team work and co-operation. This is certainly true in baseball. The ability to cope quickly and successfully as a team unit with every conceivable situation is an indispensable factor in winning games. This ability to play "*inside baseball*" is acquired, however, only by long hours of practice in the use of signals and in working out plays.

Signals.—If team play is to result, some one person must give the signals. Naturally, this person should be the manager or coach. If he remains on the bench, he should flash the signals to the third base coach who in turn relays them to the players. This does not mean that he should do the thinking for the individual players. He merely flashes the signals which mold individual efforts into team action. After the play has been started each individual player is placed on his own initiative and ingenuity.

Types of Signals.—The signal system should be as simple as possible since an elaborate set invariably works as a "boomerang," especially on inexperienced teams. Word signals are not as effective as natural movements of the body, such as leg, arm, or head movements or touching parts of the body or uniform. Folding the arms might be the signal to steal on the next pitch. Folding the arms and crossing the right leg over the left might indicate a delayed steal. Likewise, folding the arms and crossing the left leg over the right might call for a double steal. The batter might signal his intentions to attempt the hit-and-run play by tapping his bat on the plate or by wiping his hands on his uniform. Rubbing or clapping the hands, touching the knees, tipping or removing the cap, looking at a teammate, i.e., eye meeting eye, rubbing the uniform up or down or crosswise, pulling the belt, hiding one or both hands, flesh on flesh, and hand on face are only a few of the many methods of giving signals.

The Number of Signals.—The signals should not only be simple but few in number. This is accomplished by employing *basic* and *supplementary* signals. For example, a basic play is a *steal* play, but it may be a plain, double, or delayed steal. In calling for a steal the

coach should first give his fundamental steal signal, such as folding the arms, and then supplement it for a double steal by crossing one leg over the other.

In amateur baseball, signals are needed only for the bunt, the squeeze, batter control on balls and strikes, and possibly the hit-and-run. In the latter play, a *team* hit-and-run signal is more effective than the *individual* type used by members of professional teams since it is less complicated. Each batter in professional baseball must know the hit-and-run signs of the three men behind him in the batting order. Because of the inability of most amateurs to execute the hit-and-run play consistently, the individual signs are unnecessary.

The Time to Flash Signals.—It has been found that the best time to give offensive signals is after the base runner returns to the base and just before the catcher signals the pitch to his battery mate. At this time the base runner should be standing with one foot in contact with the base and waiting for the pitcher to take his position on the rubber. An alert player will always watch for the "sign."

The coach should give the signal quickly and distinctly. He should know what play to call and insist that it be attempted. If it fails, he should assume full responsibility.

When a signal is flashed, it should mean that the play is to be attempted on the next pitch. If the batter hits a foul ball, the play should be considered "off" unless given again.

Batter's Signals.—The batter may be called upon to hit straight-away, to bunt, to execute the "squeeze," or to hit behind a base runner on the hit-and-run. He should not, however, be controlled on every pitch for his is a sure way to confuse an inexperienced hitter. He should look for the signal with the count two balls and no strikes, or three balls and one strike. The sign to "hit" should mean "hit at it, if it is good."

The coach should assist the batter just before he goes to bat by warning him what to look for if certain things happen.

Straight-Away Hitting.—The signal to hit "straight-away" should be expected when a team is behind more than two runs.

The attempt should be made to hit the first good pitch. When good hitters find themselves with two balls and no strikes or three balls and one strike, it may be excellent strategy to attempt to hit rather than "take" the next pitch if it is a strike. A "waiting" game may be effective in early innings or against a pitcher with poor control. On the other hand, "first-ball" hitting may be more effective in later innings, or against a pitcher with control.

Every team should have a *hit* and a *take* signal which indicate whether the batter is to attempt to hit the next pitch or let it go by.

The Hit-and-Run.—The hit-and-run play would be better named if it were called the run-and-hit, since the runner starts on a certain pitch and the batter tries to hit on the ground behind him. This maneuver is a little advanced for most amateur teams but if used at all it should be attempted: to start a rally in the early innings; to avoid hitting into a double play; to hold a lead; or to play for a break at a strategic time. The professional player picks his own ball and signals his teammate on first base, but this plan does not work out so well in college. Obviously, the play should not be attempted when the pitcher is ahead of the batter, with the count more strikes than balls. On the contrary, the play should be called when the pitcher is in the "hole" with the count two balls and no strikes or three balls and one strike. Some professional players, however, who are expert with the hit-and-run, may use the play when the pitcher has the advantage, or at any time when they think the opposition is not expecting it.

An ideal time to use the play is in a close game with a runner on first base, one out, and the count two balls and no strikes. The pitcher is almost sure to throw a strike.

Some teams have an "automatic" hit-and-run with a runner on first, one or two outs, and three balls and one strike on the batter. In this situation, the batter will secure a base on balls if the pitch is a ball. On the other hand, if it is a strike he should hit it.

The technique for this play has been described in a previous chapter. The batter should try to hit a ground ball behind the runner to right field through the opening left by the second baseman, as he runs to cover second base. It might well be repeated, however, that the coach should give the signal to the batter and the base runner, on the pitch he wants the play to be attempted. The batter must hit the ball, even if compelled to throw the bat at it to do so. In event of failure his teammate will doubtless be thrown out at second base. If the ball is fouled, the play should be considered "off" unless called again. This is a simpler method and prevents confusion.

The base runner can assist materially in the success of the play. He should attract no undue attention but should get a comfortable lead and dash for second base as the pitcher delivers the ball. When he hears the "crack" of the bat he should glance quickly over his shoulder and locate the ball. Of course, if it is a fly ball which can be caught, he must return to first base. On the other hand, if he does not hear the "crack" of the bat, he should attempt to steal the base by sliding.

The Bunt.—The importance of bunting in amateur baseball was discussed in a previous chapter. In this era of heavy hitting the bunt is seldom used in the early innings by professional teams. School and college teams, however, will find it pays big dividends in most any inning. It should be used in any inning in professional or amateur baseball with runners on first and second and no outs. Both runners should be advanced by the sacrifice bunt. It is invariably used also during the late innings of a close game with no outs, and a runner on first, or a runner on second, or runners on first and second. The pitcher, unless an unusually good hitter, should bunt with one man out.

The Squeeze Play.—The success of the squeeze play depends upon the bunting ability of the batter. It is usually made with a runner on third base and one out, although it may be excellent strategy, particularly in amateur baseball, to employ it with no outs. The signal for the squeeze should be flashed to the batter and the base runner at the same time, and just before the catcher gives his sign for the next pitch.

There are two kinds of squeeze plays, the running or "suicide" squeeze and the "safety" squeeze.

The "Suicide" or Running Squeeze.—When the signal is flashed for a running or "suicide" squeeze the base runner should dash for home as the pitch is delivered. *The batter must bunt that particular pitch.* Obviously, the ball must be bunted on the ground or away from any fielder. If the play is detected by the opposition and the pitch is "wasted" or wide, the runner will invariably be tagged out. Both the batter and the runner should return the signal to show they have it. The play requires perfect team work. The signal for this play might be rubbing the hands together.

The "Safety" Squeeze.—When the signal is flashed for a "safety" squeeze, the runner takes a comfortable lead off third *but waits for the batter to pick a good ball to bunt.* He should not start home on this play until the ball is actually bunted. This play requires a nearly perfect bunt.

The signal for the "safety" squeeze might be the rubbing of the hands together supplemented by placing the hands on the knees.

"Block" Signals for Calling Off Plays.—It frequently happens that the play called for does not get under way because of a foul ball or other reason. Because of this fact, it is a good plan to have a "block" signal which indicates that the play is "off" and the batter or base runner is to proceed on his own initiative.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. What is meant by "inside baseball?"
2. List several possible ways of giving signals in baseball.
3. Differentiate between *basic* and *supplementary* signals.
4. When is the best time to flash the signal to batter or base runner?
5. What is meant by "straight-away" hitting? What is meant by the *hit* and *take* signals?
6. What is meant by the statement that the hit-and-run play is a misnomer? Is this play adapted to high school players? College players?
7. In what situation should the "*automatic*" hit-and-run play apply?
8. Explain the difference between the "suicide" and "safety" squeeze.

TEST QUESTIONS

- | | | |
|---|---|--|
| T | F | 1. Word signals are more effective than natural movements of the body. |
| T | F | 2. The signals for offensive baseball should be few in number and very simple. |
| T | F | 3. A <i>team</i> hit-and-run signal is more effective in professional baseball than <i>individual</i> signals. |
| T | F | 4. If the coach signals for a play which fails, he should assume full responsibility. |
| T | F | 5. High school batters should look to the coach for a signal before every pitch. |
| T | F | 6. The sign to hit should mean " <i>hit at the pitch if it is good.</i> " |
| T | F | 7. The batter should look for a <i>hit</i> or <i>take</i> sign with the count three balls and one strike. |
| T | F | 8. A batter should be permitted to hit <i>straight-away</i> when his team is behind by more than two runs. |
| T | F | 9. The hit-and-run play is frequently attempted in professional baseball to avoid hitting into a double play. |
| T | F | 10. The successful "safety" squeeze requires a nearly perfect bunt. |

INDEX

- Arm
 - Care of, 21
- Assists
 - First baseman, 35
- Bartell, 51
- Base running, 78
 - Hints on, 83
 - Sliding, 81
- Bat, 65
- Batting, 65
 - Grip, 70
 - Hints, 71
 - Order, 74
 - Position, 67
 - Practice, 66
 - Stride, 68
 - Swing, 70
 - Timing, 68
- Body pivot and swing
 - Pitcher, 13
- Bunting, 72
- Bunts, the fielding of
 - Catcher, 28
 - First baseman, 35
 - Second baseman, 44
 - Tactics, 88
- Catcher
 - Backing up, 28
 - Bunts, 28
 - Fly balls, 27
 - Footwork, 26
 - Hints to, 29
 - Position, 23
 - Receiving, 24
 - Shifting feet, 25
 - Signals, 28
- Carey, Max, 78
- Change-of-pace, 7
- Cobb, "Ty," 19, 67, 78, 79
- Cochrane, 65
- Collins, Eddie, 78
- Control, 15
- Covering first, 20
- Critz, Hughie, 44
- Cronin, 51, 65
- Curve ball, 16
- Cut-off play, 57
- Delayed steal, 82
- Delivery
 - Pitcher's, 12
- DiMaggio, 67, 68, 75
- Doubleday, Abner, 10
- Double play, 41
- Double steal, 44, 82
 - Base runners, 82
 - Second baseman, 44
 - Third baseman, 56
- Fast ball, 16
- Fielding
 - First baseman, 34
 - Pitcher, 18
 - Second baseman, 40
 - Shortstop, 47
 - Third baseman, 54
- First baseman
 - Assists, 35
 - Bunts, 35
 - Catching, 31
 - Fielding, 34
 - Footwork, 31-33
 - Physical qualifications, 31
 - Stretch, 32
 - Tagging, 36
- Floater, 18
- Fly balls
 - Catcher, 7
- Follow-through
 - Pitcher, 14
- Footwork
 - Catcher, 26
 - First baseman, 31
 - Second baseman, 43
- Foxx, Jimmie, 65, 75
- Frisch, 75

Gehrig, 67, 75
 Gehringer, 75
 Greenberg, 75
 Grip, 11

Herman, Billie, 65
 Hit and run, 87
 Hitting, 65
 Guess, 67
 Place, 71

Hornsby, Rogers, 65, 67
 Hubbell, Carl, 18

Klein, Chuck, 65

Lindstrom, 75

Mancuso, Gus, 18
 Mathewson, Christy, 18
 Medwick, Joe, 65, 76
 Moore, Joe, 65

Ott, Mel, 65
 Outfielding, 59
 Playing hitters, 62
 Positions, 59
 Relays, 63
 Tactics, 63
 Throwing, 59

Pitcher
 Body pivot, 13
 Care of arm, 21
 Control, 15
 Covering first, 20
 Delivery, 12
 Fielding, 18
 Follow-through, 14
 Grip of ball, 11
 Position on rubber, 11
 Strategy, 20
 Throw to bases, 19

Pitches
 Curve, 16
 Fastball, 16
 Floater, 18

Pitches—Continued

 Kinds, 16
 Knuckle ball, 18
 Over-arm, 14
 Screw ball, 18
 Side-arm, 15
 Slow ball, 17
 Under-arm, 15
 Waste ball, 21

Receiving the ball
 Catcher, 24
 Relay throws, 45
 Reverse curve, 18
 Rolfe, Red, 56, 75
 Rubber, 11
 Ruth, Babe, 67, 68, 75

Screw ball, 18
 Seams, 11
 Second baseman, 39
 Sewell, 68
 Shifting the feet
 Catcher, 25
 Shortstop, 47
 Signals, 28, 85, 86
 Sisler, George, 31
 Sliding, 81
 Slow ball, 17
 Squeeze play, 8
 Stealing, 44, 81, 82
 Strategy, 20, 62
 Stretch, 13, 32
 Stride, 68
 Strike area, 15

Tactics, 55, 63
 Tagging, 28, 36, 41
 Terry, Bill, 31, 32, 57, 65, 75
 Third baseman, 54
 Throwing, 48, 51
 Trapping runners, 41

Vaughn, Arky, 65

Waner, Paul, 65
 Wind-up, 12

